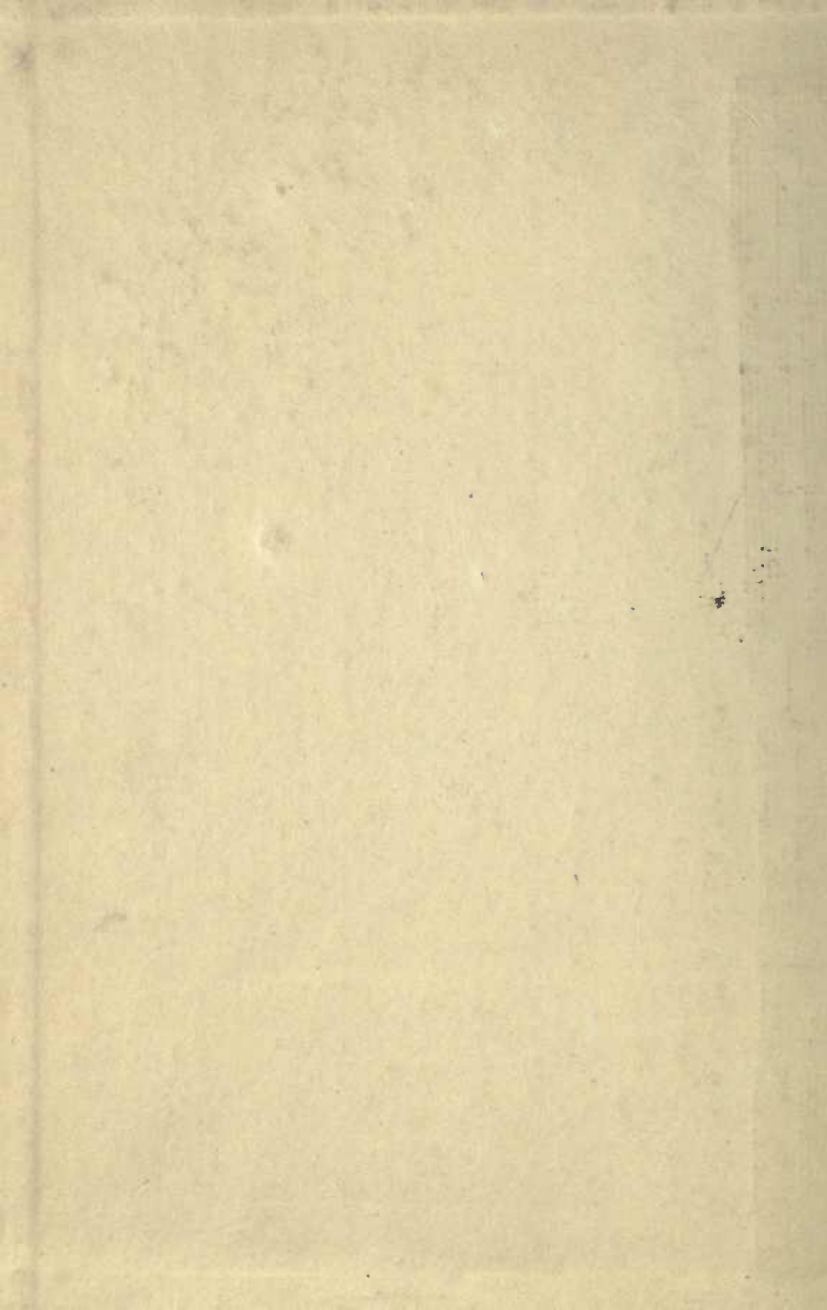


# *Stories Without Tears*

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• • • BARRY PAIN • • •

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From Aunt Harriet  
in the "Sunshine Bag" - 1922

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STORIES WITHOUT TEARS

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# STORIES WITHOUT TEARS

BY  
BARRY PAIN

AUTHOR OF "ONE KIND AND ANOTHER,"  
"STORIES IN GREY," ETC.



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STORIES WITHOUT TEARS



# STORIES WITHOUT TEARS

## I

### GREAT POSSESSIONS

**M**R. WILFRED SANDYS, assistant master at "Sunniholme," had a small sitting-room assigned to him at the top of the house. It was rather a dark and sullen little room, furnished principally with what had been left over. Against one of the walls stood a cottage piano in light oak, bearing the name of an unknown German maker; its inward parts were so full of wickedness that it had long before retired from active service. Piano was a courtesy title—the thing was a sideboard really. Over the mantelpiece was a gas-bracket. The gas had been cut off from it in order (as Mr. Worthy pointed out) to avoid accidents. The room was illuminated in the evening by a small lamp when Emma remembered it. When Emma forgot it, it was idle to have recourse to the bell-pull, though it was a tasteful bell-pull. The bell itself had been removed because (as Mr. Worthy explained) you cannot have the maid-servants kept for ever running up and down stairs; this, I think, cannot be gainsaid. In fact, there was very little in the room that really worked—except Mr. Wilfred Sandys.

The supper-tray of Mr. Wilfred Sandys stood on the piano. Emma had said when she brought it up

that it was a funny thing she had forgotten that old lamp again. The room was illuminated at present by one candle, the property of a gentleman, the said candle being affixed by and of itself to the lid of a tobacco-tin. The repast which that gentleman had just concluded had consisted of a warped slice of cold mutton with blood-vessels, and, apparently, string in it; of a portion of American cheddar, of bread, and of two-thirds of a pint of the school beer. The tray being removed, writing-materials and exercise-books were now placed on the table—a kitchen table veiled by a stained cloth, with the remains of chenille blobs round the edge of it.

Mr. Sandys opened an exercise-book and observed that Smithson's first sentence was "*dicit ut veniret.*" To a pedant this hardly seemed a satisfactory rendering of "he says that he will come." But in times of mental perplexity, which were frequent with him, Smithson always gave up hope and went into the subjunctive. Wilfred Sandys decided suddenly that, after all, he would not correct those exercise-books that night; he had done enough for one day.

He took methodical steps for his own comfort. He put the coal (what there was of it) on the fire. He placed in position the easy chair, with three exercise-books to take the place of a missing castor. He fetched from his bedroom a glass and water-bottle. Then he removed the lower front of the ex-piano and took out from the interior a bottle of Scotch whisky—good whisky, but, of course, a thing prohibited.

A high standard of virtue, such as that which was suitably maintained by Mr. Worthy in his seminary, has many advantages too obvious for comment. Amongst others, it enables the sinner to get a great

deal of excitement out of very little sin. Wilfred Sandys never bought his whisky in the town. There were occasional Saturdays when he had the afternoon and evening entirely at his disposal; then it was that he visited a distant hostelry and returned sin-laden in the dark. So far he had been undetected, but it was constantly occurring to him that one night on his return he might stumble on the stone stairs, and the bottle would break, and its contents would be spilled; Mr. Worthy would arrive upon the scene at once, and it would be difficult to convince him that this was really furniture polish which Sandys had purchased for the improvement of the German ex-piano. It is probable that the murderer feels much the same when disposing of the corpse of his victim as Sandys felt when he was getting rid of an empty bottle. Once Mr. Worthy had stopped him on his way down to the river with the incriminating bottle concealed about his person, as the police say. For a moment Sandys had thought that all was lost, including honor. But Mr. Worthy had merely observed in his fat, sad voice that he wished Mr. Sandys would abstain from wearing colored neckties on Sundays, and passed on unsuspecting.

I do not wish to suggest any dark picture of a secret drunkard. Sandys was secret enough, because he did not wish to lose the forty-five pounds, with board and lodging, which he received annually from Mr. Worthy; but he was not given to excess. He had little fear that he would be caught in the act of drinking that nightly glass of whisky and water, for there was a long flight of stone stairs between the proprietor's study and the assistant master's garret; and Mr. Worthy was a man

of plethoric habit. When he wanted his hireling he rang and sent somebody to fetch him.

To-night Sandys lapsed into reverie. Had it, then, been worth while—the sacrifice made by that poor country parson in order that his son might obtain in the Classical Tripos the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the University of Cambridge? The end had been achieved. Wilfred Sandys had just, as it had been by the skin of his teeth, managed to secure that degree, and he had had incidentally three good years—years when he made many friends, spent his father's money, neglected his work, and was strenuous in athletic exercises. But what was left after the achievement? His father's death had made him the possessor of some thirty pounds a year from gilt-edged investments. He had no relations on his father's side to help him, and he had nothing to expect from the Beltons, who had resented the marriage of their daughter with a poor curate, as the father of Wilfred was at that time. He had suddenly felt the knife across the golden thread of his life. Playtime was over, and work was to be done. He was away from the pleasant sward, and over the edge of the precipice. There was no established business, no waiting partnership, to receive him on a bed of down. There was good advice—from people who told him solemnly what every man of his age and intelligence knew already. There were vague promises and assurances from young college friends who had slightly over-estimated their influence in the world. The cold fact was that he had to look out for himself. Suddenly awakened out of sleep, he saw that there was more than one profession in which he might succeed if he could wait. He saw also that he could not possibly afford to wait. He must put himself into



the market as he was. A clean character, a moderate skill in tennis and cricket, and a third in Classical Honors—that was what he had to offer. The demand for such things is not feverish. It became clear to him that he must be a schoolmaster.

Wilfred Sandys had haunted the agents' office in Sackville Street. He had had splendid testimonials printed, and had gradually come to realize that most people of ordinary decency have absolutely magnificent testimonials. He had taken one post which he had found impossible. He had afterwards waited for a time, waited almost to the verge of fear for his daily bread. He had closed eagerly with the offer of Mr. Worthy, with whom he had been for three years. Mr. Worthy printed a very dubious M.A. after his name in his prospectus, but (with or without academic distinction) he had a fairly good connection, and his heart was in his business. It was merely a business to this soup-merchant, but he was no fool at it. The mid-day dinner was not luxurious, but Mr. Worthy had quite realized the line beneath which it was not safe to go. He had a sufficient staff of servants, treated them well, and paid them well, since it is often difficult to get a housemaid. It is always easy to get an assistant master, but even here he was moderately generous and conscious of generosity. "Many head masters," he had said to Sandys, "forbid smoking to the under masters. I do not. Smoke as much as you like—except, of course, in the presence of the boys."

That is a common point of view; the boy sees every day in the holidays that his father, his uncle, and his elder brothers smoke, but he must not believe that his holy schoolmaster could possibly smoke. In this, as possibly in some other respects, the intelligence of the

ordinary boy is frequently underrated or misunderstood by the gentlemen who profess to train that intelligence. For the rest, Sandys was a safe, conscientious, able master, with the prestige of a real degree. Mr. Worthy fully recognized this, and did not wish to part with him. He could have supplied his place in twenty-four hours, but the new-comer might easily have been less satisfactory. He did not give him the same consideration that he would have given to the cook, but still he gave him some consideration; he managed to keep him just above resignation.

Mr. Sandys, as he sipped his diluted and forbidden whisky, could not call himself conscientious; but he maintained that no grown man of common sense should obey an absurd rule. He did not even call himself an able master. It seemed to him that somehow or other he ought to have made Smithson understand more about the *Oratio Obliqua*. And it further seemed to him that, summing up the situation, he had nothing to hope for in the way of advancement, and that he had everything to fear in the way of actual loss. There is no chance for the under master in a private school to advance in his profession; the places at the miserable top of it are taken by those who, thanks to capital or connection, have started at the top. As time went on, Sandys knew that he would become less and less valuable in a principal's eyes, until finally there would be no work for him at all. He would be told on all sides that a younger and more active man was required. For that evil day he ought, of course, to make provision, but with his present salary he saw no decent possibility of saving money at all. He would be compelled to break into his capital—the eight hundred he had inherited from his father. Possibly,

he might buy an annuity with it. It was a wretched business.

He was roused from his reverie by the sound of a footstep on the stairs. It was not the well-known step of Mr. Worthy, nor was it the light, quick step of a boy. Sandys supposed that Mr. Worthy wanted to see him about some school matter, and had sent Emma to say so. That being so, it was not worth while to conceal the whisky-bottle.

The door opened, and a blaze of light entered. Behind the blaze of light was a tall female figure.

"Thanks, Emma," said Sandys. "Just put it on the table, will you?"

The lamp was put down on the table, and revealed that this was not Emma. He might have known, of course, that it was not Emma; for though Emma frequently forgot the perilous task of bringing the lamp with the supper-tray, she would never have made a second journey up the stairs to bring it afterwards. She was by no means the kind of girl to overdo things.

This, it appeared, was a new housemaid. She had arrived that afternoon, and, in reply to Sandys' question, she said that her name was Rose. She was to have the care of his rooms in future, because she did not mind the stairs, and Emma did. She spoke easily, without forwardness or embarrassment. Her voice was pleasant, and her pronunciation correct. In appearance she was young, fresh and strong, graceful in movement. Her face was well enough—kind eyes, too large a mouth, and much dark hair with a smooth severity. Her figure was really beautiful. As she spoke, she did things. She drew the shabby curtain over the window. She brushed the hearth. She picked up the repellent supper-tray from the piano.

“Good night, sir,” she said, as she closed the door behind her.

Sandys had in his time said severe things about the man who regards a maid-servant in any other than the cold and official light, but our circumstances play havoc with our opinions. His life had become lonely, a life with no women in it. He taught boys in his working hours, and sometimes chatted with the other, non-resident, masters in his leisure. There were even times when that dubious Master of Arts, Mr. Worthy, unbent and spoke with Sandys of the political situation over a glass of dubious port. Sandys did not grumble at such things, but they left him lonely and unfulfilled. Warm-blooded youth and a natural love of beauty demanded more. So now it was useless for the trained and conventional side of Sandys to make the chilly observation that here was a new housemaid. The natural man insisted on saying, “Here is an unusual and delightful woman—and I hope I shall see more of her.”

A contrast with Emma suggested itself. Emma never did her work properly, considered it as a grievance that she had to do any work at all, and used a manner of speech which was distressing. Sandys had never known Emma to draw the curtain or to sweep the hearth. Emma frequently forgot the lamp, and always left the used, soiled, sickening supper-tray to sit on the ex-piano until she “did” the room in the morning. The contrast was accentuated on the following evening. The supper-tray did not wear its customary air of a brutal attempt to make Wilfred Sandys give up feeding for the future. And when Rose removed the tray she placed on the table a jug of fresh water and a clean glass; her quick eye had de-

tected the conversion of the bedroom water-bottle to a sitting-room use on the previous evening. It seemed to him that the lamp gave more light, and the nauseous smell of paraffin had gone from it. Rose had trimmed the wick, and cleaned the lamp and the lamp-glass. Emma had limited herself to giving the thing "more ile" when she happened to remember it. When in the morning Sandys lifted a book from the ex-piano he was surprised not to see its imprint in the dust; examination showed that there was no dust. In his early period he had prayed Emma to remove dust, but she had shaken her head. She had explained that she was always so hurried of a morning. Briefly, Rose was a real woman, and Emma was a red-headed slut.

A further portent presented itself next day. Sandys picked up the exercise-books to place, as usual, under the leg of the easy chair, and, behold, the missing castor had been replaced and the exercise-books were no longer needed.

"Rose," said Sandys, "I see this chair has been mended at last. How did you manage to get that done?"

Rose smiled, showing white teeth. "I did that myself, sir."

"Yourself?"

"Yes; there's a box of rubbish downstairs—old curtain-rings and picture-hooks and such things, and I found the castor there. Then I borrowed the screw-driver that belongs to cook's sewing-machine, and I persuaded the boot-boy to give me a few screws."

"That castor's been off for the last two years. Thank you very much, Rose. You're a wonderful woman."

"No; but I don't like to see things wrong that can

be put right. It's the way I feel about it. Good night, sir."

The good night had come rather abruptly. She was gone. She never hurried, but she was always doing a piece of work or going on to the next piece. She was willing to talk a little, but she did not seem to want to jabber, as Emma always did. Sandys wished she had stayed a few moments longer. He had noticed a slight and rather fascinating play of color in her face, something different from the solid purple blush that Emma wore in her moments of embarrassment. There had been a quick flush when he called her a wonderful woman, and again before that when—yes, when she said that she had persuaded the boot-boy to give her some screws. How, then, had she persuaded the boot-boy? That was a dark thought.

Her splendid efficiency moved Sandys to see for the first time that there was no such thing as contemptible work, but that there were many contemptible workers. Emma and many others of her kind were contemptible workers—they worked reluctantly, without intelligent interest in the work, and were a menial class. But the work itself—domestic work—was as fine as any other, and a woman who was capable and had a good will in such work, was far beyond the ridicule that hits the inefficient sisterhood of the craft.

He took an early opportunity of trying to lend Rose books. He had quite determined that she must be fond of reading, and was disappointed with her reply:

"No, thank you, sir. Unless—perhaps—you've got a book on poultry."

He misunderstood her. "Yes," he said; "I think I have a book about poetry."

She laughed a little. "It was poultry I said, sir—fowls and chickens."

Mr. Wilfred Sandys, curiously enough, had no book on poultry. He had imagined that she would like reading: she had seemed well educated, unlike Emma.

"But I never read just for the sake of it. If there's a book to tell me something I want to learn, that's different. I like doing things better than reading."

He tried a further question as to her education, but she admitted no more than a Board School had provided. He urged that she spoke like a well-educated woman.

"Well, if there's anything to do, I want to do it properly—it's all the same whether it's making a bed or just talking."

Again she gave him no opportunity to converse at length with her; her work called her away. On second thoughts he decided that he was not disappointed at all in her refusal of books. It was splendidly honest and unaffected. A liking for stories of love and adventure is not by any means an invariable sign of a mind of the highest type. Emma read the feuilleton with regularity, and had no mind at all.

As he handed her a copy of "Poultry for Profit" on the following evening, he observed that he found he had got such a book, after all. He had got it, as a matter of fact, from the station bookstall that afternoon.

"It is very kind of you, sir," she said; "but I did not mean you to buy the book for me. I don't like that."

But he persuaded her to take it and to keep it. She had made him so much more comfortable than he had been under the reign of Emma. The book was the

merest trifle—a mark of grateful recognition of her services. And, by the way, how did she come to be interested in that subject?

“We kept fowls at home, and so I got to know something about them—but not enough. I shall learn more from the book in odd minutes. It will be useful to me one day. I’m not always going on with my present work.”

She came back to his room an hour later with a message: “Mr. Worthy told me to say, sir, that he wished to see you in his study at once.”

“Very well, Rose. Thanks.”

He laid down his pipe. Mr. Worthy had possibly invented a new schedule of work—a thing to which he was very liable. Whatever else may be urged against Mr. Worthy’s attainments, it must be said in fairness that he could rule lines in red ink as well as any man in the kingdom. The new schedule of work as drawn out by Mr. Worthy was nearly as pretty as a map. But there was not any schedule which required discussion at the present time—it was a more serious matter. Sandys recognized that as soon as he entered the study.

“Sit down, if you please, Mr. Sandys,” said Mr. Worthy, in his sad, slow voice, and continued the letter which he was writing.

He was rather a bloated and small-eyed gentleman, dressed, as was his invariable custom, in a dark gray suit, with a black bow necktie. Silence was one of the weapons in his armory when it was necessary to quell the refractory. The small boy who had been guilty of any great crime was brought into Mr. Worthy’s study, and Mr. Worthy would then proceed as now, to the letter-writing trick. Occasionally he



would look up and glare steadily at the boy, and then resume his letter in silence. With every moment the stare and the silence grew more awful; sometimes the small boy would be so affected by it that he would begin to weep even before the principal of "Sunniholme" had opened his mouth—a result of which the heroic Mr. Worthy was proud.

But as Mr. Wilfred Sandys was not a little boy, the impressive silence did not impress him in that way; it merely seemed to him disgustingly uncivil on the part of that boor-pig, his employer. He noticed that Mr. Worthy's black bow was not quite straight, and wished he would put it straight. His eye strayed to the lavish apparatus of the writing-table (four kinds of ink and rubber stamps in great variety), and upwards to the engravings, framed in oak, of English cathedrals. What could be more reassuring to a hesitating parent than an engraving of a cathedral?

"And now, Mr. Sandys," said his employer, "I am sorry to say that I have some unpleasant matters to speak of to you. The other day I picked up Pennington's exercise-book, and wrote in it a correction of one of his sentences; I find to-day that you have crossed out my correction and substituted a rendering of your own."

"Yes," said Sandys genially, "it was a bit awkward. You see, you'd—er—made a slip, and I had to give the boy the correct Latin, but I put it all right for you, I think. I told Pennington that he must have given you the wrong English."

"The boy did not believe you. Quite by accident, I overheard him say that he did not believe you." Mr. Worthy went about in rubber-soled shoes, and often overheard things by accident. "He told the elder

Robinson that he was sure he had given me the right English, that the blunder was mine, and that I knew no more Latin than—er—his foot.”

“Sorry,” said Sandys. “Nuisance, isn’t it?”

“It is something more than that. It is either a gross act of insubordination or a stupid want of judgment, and in either case I do not see how we are to go on together. I do not profess to be a classical scholar, but that is not the point. Right or wrong, I will not be corrected by any man that I employ. Least of all will I be corrected to one of my own pupils. You have behaved badly. And that is not the worst!”

Sandys perceived that he was meant to ask what the worst was. So he carefully refrained from asking it.

“The worst,” said Mr. Worthy impressively, “is that you, Mr. Sandys, are a secret drunkard.”

“That’s a lie!” said Sandys, with unpardonable abruptness.

“And you would not dare to address me in that way if you were not under the influence of liquor at this very moment. I—er—had occasion to see if the piano in your sitting-room could be adapted for practice-work by the junior pupils——”

“Yes, I see,” said Sandys. “But I’m not going to be spoken to in this way, all the same.” He rose to go.

“You understand that you leave at the end of this term. I am giving you notice, sir.” Mr. Worthy was approaching apoplexy.

Mr. Sandys was rude enough to snap his fingers. He opened the door.

“No character, Mr. Sandys. No testimonials,” gasped Mr. Worthy. His fist struck the table.

Sandys paused with his hand on the door. "If your ignorance of Latin has been discovered here by the little boys, it must naturally annoy you, Mr. Worthy. I did my best to screen you, anyhow. But if you let your annoyance lead you into repeating to others your silly lie that I am a secret drunkard, you'll have some pretty serious consequences to take. I leave at the end of the term, and it will be time enough for you to jabber about testimonials when I come and ask you for one."

Mr. Worthy was still engaged in a breathless search for words to express himself when the door closed. By the time the torrential eloquence was ready there was no Sandys there to receive it.

Sandys sat upstairs in his room, well satisfied with what he had done and with the fate that had befallen him. Had Mr. Worthy mildly reminded him that he had broken a regulation, Sandys would have had to admit as much. In his temper, Mr. Worthy had gone far beyond that, had brought preposterous charges, and had put himself in the wrong. Just for one glorious time Sandys had treated his employer precisely as he deserved—that alone was worth much.

His mind was at ease that it was all over. No longer would there exist his ignominious conspiracy with Mr. Worthy to hide the principal's ignorance of subjects that he professed to teach. No longer would his freedom be limited by a stupid set of rules degrading to a man of his age. No longer would he have sordid anxieties about surreptitious bottles. No longer would he deceive small boys by upholding to them a system of morality which he himself neither approved nor practised. No longer would he have to treat as his

superior a man whom, frankly, he knew to be his inferior.

The disaster which he had feared—the loss of his post and of his salary—had happened at last, and it no longer seemed to him a disaster. He would never be a schoolmaster again. His ideas about work had changed. He was ready now to use his hands and his bodily strength as well as his education and intelligence. He was ready to run a shop, keep a public-house, work at poultry-farming, or at gardening. Eight hundred pounds of capital he had; energy and good will he had; he could find a partner with the necessary knowledge and experience of whatever business he decided to take up. His friends would probably talk, but he no longer cared about that; they had done nothing for him, and no regard for their conventions should keep him from a free and honest life.

That night there came suddenly into his mind an idea which recurred during the next few days—he might possibly marry Rose.

She might have undesirable relations, and she certainly had not the artistic temperament; his friends who heard that he had married the housemaid would consider that he had definitely gone down the abyss. On the other hand, he was not proposing to marry her relations, did not overvalue the artistic temperament, and no longer proposed for himself a slavery to public opinion. On the other hand, too, there were her kindly soul, her keen intelligence, her healthy and beautiful body. To put aside ambition, to put aside all accepted ideas, and to work happily in her company at any open-air employment, seemed peaceful and desirable.

Sandys had put aside his first impulse, which was

to leave "Sunniholme" at once, partly because he thought this departure might be what Mr. Worthy would like best and partly because of Rose. As the weeks went on he got to know her much better. He had always treated her with respect, and he had won her confidence. He got glimpses of her home life. Her father, who was dead, had not made farming pay. "But then that was the wrong sort of farming," said the sagacious Rose. She meant to go back to the country, and loved it "because there's always so much to do there," an opinion not usually endorsed by the ruralizing Cockney. She had saved forty-five pounds already.

It was noticeable, too, as the weeks went on, that Mr. Worthy's mental attitude towards secret drunkards must have undergone a considerable change. He became wondrous civil to Mr. Sandys. There was even a suggestion of a glass of port and a cigar in Mr. Worthy's study after a Sunday midday meal; it is to the credit of Sandys that there was nothing sardonic in his refusal. He was really indifferent to the civility or rudeness of his employer. He did his work and did it well, because that was in accordance with his new view of all work. But he did not mean to be a schoolmaster any more, and he did definitely mean to marry Rose.

He did not know what Rose's own feelings about it might be. She was not perhaps the woman for a grand and poetical passion—you cannot find all beauties and all utilities in one woman. Her easy, respectful, sexless friendliness towards him seemed permanent, but of course she could never have imagined that he would marry her. She would be taken utterly by surprise when he told her. He had eight hundred pounds cap-

ital, and Rose was practical. It ought to work out all right.

He read Thoreau and Emerson, and utterly failed to lend either book to Rose. His imagination was already painting his new life, in sympathy with nature, in scorn of outworn tradition and teaching. He would make no fortune—he would work in freedom for a sufficient and healthy livelihood, and be content.

And then the fortune that he had refused to seek came with all the petulance and perversity of fortune to look for him. On a Sunday morning he received a solicitor's letter, acquainting him with the death of his uncle, his mother's brother, Richard Belton. Belton had perhaps been desirous to undo the injustice that had been done in the previous generation. At any rate, after a few legacies of comparatively little importance, he left the remainder to his sister's son, Wilfred Sandys. The solicitor gave approximate figures. The annual income of Mr. Sandys in the future would be close upon three thousand pounds.

It was clear to him in a flash that part of his scheme had already gone. With the money came the responsibilities of money. He would work still—but he would not fatten chickens for the London market, nor arise early to hoe potatoes. Nor, of course, could he now marry—conscience stopped him.

Why could he not now marry Rose? He had been glad to marry her, when he had thought that her strong practical sense and knowledge of country life would help him. If he did not need those now, was she not still as she had always been, when prejudices were stripped away—an able, beautiful woman, with nothing in speech or manner to offend him, fitted to be his

wife? To desert her, merely because he had become unexpectedly rich, seemed mean and treacherous.

Once more—as he thought on these things—he received a message that Mr. Worthy wished to speak to him. Mr. Worthy plunged into the heart of the matter at once.

“Some few weeks ago, Mr. Sandys, I gave you notice. I wish to withdraw that. There was a little heat on both sides, I think. I was much worried at the time, and perhaps I was hardly justified in—er—in my deductions. Shall we let bygones be bygones?”

Here was an opportunity for triumph, yet Sandys could not bring himself to take it. He did not see how he could take it without vulgarity and bad feeling. So he was cordial in agreement that the past should be past, and he was almost apologetic in mentioning the change in his fortunes of which he had heard that morning.

Mr. Worthy congratulated heartily, and said—nor could it have been denied—that this was a change, indeed. He supposed Mr. Sandys had already formed his plans.

Mr. Sandys was vague on the subject. He wanted to work—not to live a life of ease and idleness—and to make a good use of his money.

Mr. Worthy heartily approved. “There is Parliament, for instance,” he said—again quite undeniable. There were several things which he enumerated. As an after-thought he mentioned that there was “Sunniholme”—now, it appeared, at a crisis in its upward fortunes. “Sunniholme” was a semi-detached house, and with its sister, “St. Catherine’s,” made one perfect block. “St. Catherine’s” was now in the market. Mr. Worthy had a fortnight’s option to purchase it. It

would double the accommodation, and Mr. Worthy had of late been turning pupils away to an extent that was like to break his heart.

Sandys saw whither this was drifting, and said he should think of it.

“Do,” said Mr. Worthy. “There’s the church-bell. There’s no necessity for you to attend service this morning, Mr. Sandys. You probably have letters to write and much to consider. In fact, you need take no duty to-day. Just think the thing over, you know. And you might drop in to dinner with me to-night at seven, and then—well, then we can see, we can talk it over comfortably.”

Mr. Sandys availed himself to the full of the permission given. He wrote a letter to the solicitors, and then he started off for the day. He did not mean to make a long walk, but just to get out of that atmosphere which towards the end of the term weighs heavily on most schoolmasters. It was a six-mile walk to that little hostelry where the surreptitious bottles had been procured. He might have gone by train, but the sun was bright, and there was a touch of spring in the air. His thoughts as he walked were pleasant enough. He saw himself in a masterly position. In imagination he lent money to his oppressor. What more exquisite revenge could he have? In imagination he married Rose. It would be quite obvious that he could have done much better, and that his choice was deliberate. He would still be taking his own line, away from the common rut that has been worn by the feet of the slaves. Sordid worries had passed from him; nor could he think that his freedom had come from a mere fluke. He had come into that which, in common justice, he was entitled to have.



At the inn he ordered luncheon with some care, consulting the landlord, Mr. Bowes. Mr. Bowes was a precise little man. He had been a jockey, and at present, unless you were pretty good, it was expensive to take him on in his own billiard-room. He was by nature a lifelong teetotaler, and by conviction, coupled with trade interest, an ardent enemy of all teetotalers. If he recognized in Mr. Sandys a somewhat different Mr. Sandys from the one he had met previously, he had too much tact to indicate his notice of change. Sandys lunched well, and it is possible that none of his subsequent years of freedom gave him quite so much joy as this first breath of release.

He was standing in the window chatting with Mr. Bowes when he saw a couple pass down the picturesque cobbled street. The man was a big fellow, in blue serge, with a very hard felt hat and a very shrewd face. The woman, plainly dressed in black, was Rose, and the expression of affectionate admiration on her face was one which Sandys had never seen before.

"You noticed that little lot," said Mr. Bowes. "He's going to be a rival of mine." The tone of Mr. Bowes did not indicate any bitterness.

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. Man of the name of Tomson. They're starting one of these new trust public-houses at Molesley Green, a mile away from here, and he's to be the manager. He's a nice sensible chap, I'm told, and his girl's got no nonsense about her, either. I'll lay a sovereign she stops in service right up to the time they move in."

"And when will that be?" asked Sandys.

"Well, they'll eat their next Christmas dinner there. Bless you, I don't mind. That won't interfere with

me. There's room here for all of us. Their line of business isn't exactly my line. It'll be a nice little place. I dare say she'll do something with vegetables and chickens, and so on. That sort of thing mayn't be a livelihood, but it's often a useful help."

"Quite so," said Sandys judiciously.

He took the train back, and dined pleasantly with Mr. Worthy and his very much older sister, Miss Worthy. For the first time he saw Miss Worthy in her attitude of graciousness, and thought it putrid. None the less, he took a whisky and soda in Mr. Worthy's study subsequently, went into the figures, realized that there was very little risk, and agreed to lend him a few hundreds on very easy terms.

On the following evening, when Rose brought in the supper-tray, many degrees above the average, he told her what he had heard, and congratulated her. She seemed much confused, but accepted his suggestion that, if she would tell him when the happy event took place, he would like to give her a little wedding present.

The cart and the smart little pony which he gave Rose and her husband proved very useful.

Mr. Bowes was correct in his prophecy. Rose and her husband did eat their next Christmas dinner in the new, clean, and well-appointed public-house. Mr. Wilfred Sandys, B.A., tried to picture to himself their happiness. He was travelling in Egypt at the time, and he was alone.

## II

### A MODEL MAN

#### I

SUMMER visitors to Bunham on the East Coast generally bought a copy of "Bunham and All About It" from Mr. Parkinson in the High Street. The price of that excellent guide-book is only two-pence, and it contains a frontispiece representing, in rather a thin and jaded way, the Hall of Stalactites. A line of letterpress under the illustration informs the reader that this is one of the wonders of the world, and requests him to "see p. 28."

The visitor who does "see p. 28" will find on that page a description of the Hall of Stalactites. Therein is enthusiasm tempered with information. The author (chastely veiled by the pseudonym of "Mermaid," but generally believed to be Miss Parkinson) contrasts the Hall of Stalactites with the Blue Grotto of Capri and also with Westminster Abbey; and I regret to say that neither the Abbey nor the Grotto comes out of the comparison at all well. Then follows a scientific paragraph. He that masters it will ever hereafter be able to distinguish between a stalactite and a stalagmite in the dark with one hand tied behind him, and to babble of calcium carbonate in terms of the closest intimacy. Finally, Miss Parkinson descends to common things and tells us that "the well-appointed brakes of Messrs.

Bodger & Son run twice daily during the season," and recommends us to provide ourselves with "a warm wrap to counteract the chill inseparable from these vast retreats of subterranean mystery."

There can be no doubt about it, the Hall of Stalactites is Bunham's trump-card, and Bunham plays it with energy. Anything in Bunham which can possibly exhibit a view of the Hall of Stalactites does exhibit it. It fills the picture post-cards, it crawls round china mugs, it gets under paper-weights. Jobson, the jeweller, sells at a derisory price small charms "guaranteed to be made from fallen portions of genuine stalactite." One way or another that Hall gets into the local paper every week; and if it is only a sonnet, signed "Mermaid," it is better than nothing.

No visitor can escape the Hall of Stalactites—the force of suggestion is too strong. It is doubtful if any visitor wishes to escape. There is not very much to do at Bunham. You can sit on the beach, or you can sit on the pier, or you can sit in one of the well-appointed brakes of Messrs. Bodger & Son. A young man who arrived one Monday to spend a bright holiday at sunny Bunham went to the Hall of Stalactites the very first day. On Wednesday and Thursday he went again. On Friday he went twice. On Saturday his body was taken out of the sea, and a waiter at the Bunham Railway Hotel said at the inquest that the deceased had seemed depressed.

Brakes to the Hall of Stalactites always pulled up at the Bull Inn for purposes of reference. The Bull Inn is described by Miss Parkinson as "a charming old-world hostelry." In front of the inn is the road; on the other side of the road is a patch of green, and on that patch every day during the season you might find

Samuel Pell with his working model of a coal mine. Visitors descended from the brake, went to see if the interior of the old-world hostelry was still there, wiped their mouths, and crossed the road to interview Samuel Pell and his working model. If the visitors had any money left, Pell found means to annex it.

Samuel was an old man of dignified appearance. He had abundance of white hair and a long white beard. His speech was refined, and the sentiments that he expressed were often truly admirable. He wore a soft black felt hat, but his remaining clothes were scarcely equal to it. The conjunction of a fisherman's blue jersey and a frock-coat in the last stage of putrefaction is not happy. His aged and capacious lace boots had no laces in them, and were retained *in situ* partly by the adoption of a shuffling gait and partly by personal magnetism.

Above his exhibit was a card on which Samuel had written in capitals:—

NOT A TOY  
NOT A PENNY-IN-THE-SLOT MACHIN  
A GENUINE SCIENTIFIC MODDLE  
MY OWN WORK

The motive power of the model was supplied by Samuel himself. He turned a handle at the back. It was not hard work, but he often said he was not fitted for hard work. When he turned, various things happened in the model, which gave a sectional view of a coal mine. Up above wheels went round. A basket was drawn up the shaft. At a lower level a cardboard pony performed the incredible feat of dragging a card-

board truck without moving its legs. A group of cardboard miners became smitten with various forms of locomotive disorder. One of them delivered blows with his pick at the rate of two a second. The blows made no sound, and no coal fell.

Sometimes a thoughtless humorist would point out to the exhibitor some of these lapses from realism. Samuel admitted them politely.

"You're right enough, sir, and I only wish I had the means to alter it. But the materials alone would cost me sixpence, and that is beyond my powers. By the time I've paid for the rent of my pitch here, there's barely enough left to buy me bread."

Such patience and politeness often met with their reward.

For an audience of women he had a touching story of how he had worked in the mines himself and had been dismissed by the company's manager because, while saving another man's life at the risk of his own, he had inadvertently infringed the rule which forbids miners to speak during work hours. "So there I was, ladies, with my arm and leg broken, thrown out of my employment, and with no hope for the future. But I'd my wife and family to support, and I had to do something, and then it was that I first thought of this model. Yes, ladies, I designed that and I made it, just as you see it now, while lying flat on my back in bed in agony and having only my left hand that I could use. And ever since, with the blessing of the Almighty, that model has been our means of livelihood. There are kind hearts in the world yet, and—thank you, miss; thank you, mum (don't trouble—I'll pick it up)—and Gord bless you!"

If a group of boys came up, he drew down the blind

before the model. Asked what it was, he changed the subject. Pressed further, he admitted that behind that blind was a representation of the life underground. "It's not for young boys to see. Might keep you awake all night. I should get into trouble if I showed you it. If a policeman were to see me exhibiting these horrors to the young, I should be in prison before nightfall." It was not till the sum of fourpence had been reached that he would draw up the blind and turn the handle. The spectacle generally saddened the boys. If this was really devilry, then they felt that plain chocolate gave better value for the money. And sometimes they were quite rude to poor old Samuel Pell. But Samuel remained, as ever, patient and polite.

The curate of St. Mark's said that the character of old Sammy Pell left much to be desired. This was, for the curate of St. Mark's, horribly strong language; but it was justified.

The landlord of the "charming old-world hostelry" went into further detail about Samuel. "Yes, every morning about twelve Samuel comes in from Bunham with his rotten old show on a barrow. There he sticks on that bit o' green opposite, and no more right to the pitch than the man in the moon has. No doubt, if I was to open my mouth, I could get him turned off of it, and I take jolly good care not to do it. As long as he's there he ain't in my orchard or my fowl-run. As long as I don't interfere with him, and don't forget to stand him a pint about once every three weeks, he won't interfere with me. He never touches anything of mine, but he ain't so particular with others. The other day when he was putting up his show I saw about a dozen hens' eggs in his barrow. 'How did you get 'em, Sammy?' I says. 'Bought 'em,' says Sammy.

Likely! Might as well have said he'd laid 'em. Sneaked 'em from somebody's hen-house, of course, but that was no business of mine. He don't do so badly, don't old Sammy. Some days I'll bet he takes more money than I do."

But the severest critic of Samuel Pell was Herbert Chalk, the official curator and guide of the Hall of Stalactites. The words, "Hall of Stalactites," were emblazoned in gold on his cap. Otherwise Mr. Chalk was dressed as a decent gardener. When a visitor to the mammoth stalactite chanced, as he talked to its curator, to mention that he had seen on his way there a fine old man with an ingenious model of a coal mine, fury blazed in the curator's eyes. And when he found that the kindly visitor had given Samuel half a crown, Mr. Chalk spake with his tongue.

"Then you'll excuse me, sir, but you've made a mistake. If there is a man in Bunham that ought to be put in prison and kept there till further orders, it's old Sammy Pell. I know his story. Made that model himself, did he? He did nothing of the kind. He bought it for one and nine out of a railway sale of unclaimed property twelve years ago. What's more, if its works happen to go wrong he can't even put 'em right himself, but has to go to Mr. Jobson, which is the watchmaker in the High Street, and get it done for him. And he calls himself an old coal miner, does Sammy. Why doesn't he take and call himself the Prince o' Wales at once? The nearest he's ever done to any mining has been sneaking lumps of coal out of the station-yard. That he has really done, and done regular, and this winter I'm told they mean to set a trap for him. Hope he'll be caught, too. The way he



swindles visitors here is enough to turn 'em against Bunham altogether."

Samuel knew that the curate disapproved of him, but did not mind. "I suppose," he observed, "that's what he's paid for." He knew that the landlord of the Bull Inn had no illusions about him, but he set against that the privileges that the landlord permitted him. But when, as inevitably happened, Samuel learned that the curator of the Hall of Stalactites had been saying things, he was aggrieved.

"Suppose I haven't got a wife and family," said Samuel to the landlord of the Bull Inn, "and suppose I didn't make the old model myself, and suppose I was never in a mine, and suppose I do pick up a lump of coal if I find it lying about—which is what any man of sense would do—what has all that got to do with Herbert Chalk? Live and let live is my motto. I'm not angry about it, but I'm going to stop it. There's going to be trouble between him and me, and he's going to get stalactites in the neck, is Mr. Herbert Chalk."

## II

"HULLO, Chalk," said the last of the group of visitors, as he paid his sixpence and passed through the turnstile. "You here still?"

"And why not, sir?" said Chalk, as he picked up his wand of office and exchanged the post of cash-taker for that of lecturer and guide.

"Oh, nothing," said the rather dressy young man. "It was just something I heard—in at one ear and out of another."

Chalk scowled slightly. He put less enthusiasm than

usual into his observations on the mammoth stalactite. He also said that the cave was first discovered in eighteen thousand and seven, and was corrected severely.

When the visitors left, Chalk fastened on to the dressy young man. "I'd like just two words with you, sir," he said.

"Certainly," the young man said uneasily.

"May I ask, sir, why you thought I'd got the sack, and who it was that told you?"

"Oh, you don't want to think about that."

"No, sir—not in the ordinary way. But hints of this kind have been coming up to me lately at the rate of two or three a day, and I'm putting the matter into the hands of my solicitor. My conscience is clear enough, and I give my employers every satisfaction, and I'm not going to be slandered. Those that take away a man's character should be made to pay for it. Of course, if you'd sooner not tell me in confidence, then we shall have to subpoena you as a witness and get it that way; but this is your second season at Bunham, sir, and I should be sorry to cause you any unpleasantness."

"Look here," said the young man, "I don't want to give evidence. If I tell you in confidence will you keep me out of it?"

"I will, sir," said Chalk. "You may depend upon it."

"Well, it was an old chap who shows a model of a coal mine outside the Bull Inn. His father owned the very mine of which that is a model, and the property would have come to him, only he married beneath him, and so was disinherited."

"Oh, this is beyond words! Beg pardon, sir, and what did he say?"

"He seemed well enough disposed towards you; said it was a thousand pities, and he did hope your employers would overlook it once more; said he'd implored you to give it up with tears in his eyes. A far better friend to you than you imagine, I should say."

"What! He dared to tell you that I drank?" said Chalk, with his eyes popping out of his head.

"Never used the word. He said certain things, and I put my interpretation on them. I may be wrong; but I think myself you'd better listen to his advice."

"And what do you mean by that, sir?"

"Well, you get very excited."

"And who wouldn't, with his character at stake?"

"And you were all muddled up with that bit you had to speak just now, though you must have said it hundreds of times. You said thousands when you meant hundreds, and inches when you meant feet. Sign off it, Chalk—sign off it!"

"I know I made mistakes, sir," said Chalk, "but that was simply because I was upset in my feelings. Is a vagabond like that to take away the character of a man in the same employ for ten years, and respected by all that know him? I can tell you all about Sammy Pell. He's the disgrace and sorrow of Bunham, he is. He ain't no son of no colliery proprietor, and there never was no property neither. He ain't been disherited, and that's all brag. He couldn't have married beneath him, because there's nothing lower than himself. He's not any class at all. He's a thief!—He's a liar!—He's a——"

"One moment," said the dressy young man. "For

a chap who don't like slander you seem to me to be going it. Now, I'm not going to mix myself up in your squabbles. They don't matter to me, and I'm here on a holiday; but if you can take a hint, you'll sign off—that's all. Good morning."

Chalk was left with murder in his soul. He was given a few days in which to simmer down. But in the following week, almost the last week of the season, Samuel got to work again.

As Herbert Chalk stood at the receipt of custom at the Hall of Stalactites, an old lady of severe countenance put down half a crown to pay her entrance, and waited for change.

"Half a crown, mind!" she said warningly. "Not two shillings. Don't make any mistake!"

The thing had not yet dawned on Herbert Chalk. "That's all right, mum," he said cheerfully. "I don't often make any mistake."

The old lady glared at him. "Are you the man Chalk?" she asked.

"That's my name," said Herbert, still genial.

"Then I have a message for you." She showed tact. She waited until she could get Chalk away from the crowd before she delivered her message. "Mind you," she said, "I don't want to express any opinion one way or the other. The vicar may be right or he may be wrong. There is such a thing as misplaced generosity, and I can generally tell by the type of a man's face——"

Herbert Chalk was rude enough to interrupt. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "If you've got a message for me, let's have it."

But the old lady was composed of whalebone and

pure rubber, quite indestructible, and specially built for endurance over the conversational course.

“Oh, yes, you do know what I’m talking about, and I hope it may be a warning to you. It was an old man with a long white beard asked me to deliver the message. Was coming with it himself but his feet were painful, and, being active still, I was glad to oblige. ‘Tell him,’ he says, ‘that if he can get his employers to give him another chance, the vicar will make up the missing money, believing that he yielded to sudden temptation and will be more honest in the future.’ And, as I said before, if——”

Chalk had whipped out his note-book. His air was that of deadly and terrific composure. “That’s enough,” he said; “I’ll take your name and address, if you please, madam. And if somebody don’t get seven years’ penal for this, I’m a Dutchman. I go straight to my lawyer’s from here.” He touched the point of his pencil with his tongue. “Now, please, madam?”

“What?” said the old lady. “My name and address? The idea of such a thing! Why, I’d as soon trust you with my money. I do a kindness, and then you talk to me like that. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

She left him—speechless, defeated, despairing.

And while that fairly good man, the custodian of the Hall of Stalactites, suffered acutely from undeserved imputations, Samuel Pell on the bit of green opposite the Bull Inn was enjoying himself immensely. He was exhibiting his scientific model to a group of romantically minded ladies. Pointing to one of the moth-eaten figures, at present in a state of extreme but ataxic activity, he declared, “And that, ladies, is an exact representation of the miner whose life I saved!”

## III

BUT Samuel Pell had not yet finished with his enemy. Next week Chalk's domestic peace was threatened.

Mrs. Chalk, usually a smiling and cheerful woman, became morose. She asked her husband if he was particularly partial to the name of Bella. She wondered why, if he was so fond of yellow hair, he married a woman with brown. She said that when a married man of fifty went about with a girl, it was ridiculous as well as wicked. She added that a silly young hussy who came up to the Hall of Stalactites every day, and sometimes two or three times a day, would be likely to get a broomstick across her face to give her something else to think about.

It took Herbert Chalk two days of hard and patient talking to convince his wife that the girl Bella, with the yellow hair and the unfortunate devotion to himself, was entirely mythical, had no real existence, and was invented by that bad man, Sammy Pell.

"He'll be the ruin of me, that chap will," said Chalk dejectedly.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Chalk. "I dare say if you'd let Sammy alone, he'd have let you alone."

On the following Sunday Herbert Chalk, taking his nasty-tempered terrier for a run on the cliffs, espied Samuel taking his ease on one of the public seats. The dog also espied him, and at a distance of fifty yards made a rush for him, barking furiously. Chalk might have called his dog off, but did not.

Samuel appeared to move slowly, but he was quick enough for his purpose. His boot, being unimpeded by laces, came off very easily. When the dog was at a

distance of ten yards that boot flew through the air, smote the dog violently amidships, and knocked him over. The dog gave it up, and returned to his master, complaining bitterly.

"I've got another boot if you care to apply for it," called Samuel.

But Herbert Chalk pretended to be unconscious of the incident, and walked with dignity in the opposite direction.

At the close of the season Samuel Pell left Bunham for his holiday. Nobody knew where he spent his holiday. "South of France, likely," said the landlord of the Bull Inn. "He's made enough money for it this season. Wicked, I call it."

He returned to Bunham in December, and apparently still had money left to live upon. He never attempted to do any work. He spent a great part of the day in the public reading-room. But if he stayed at home—one room over a small news-agent's shop—he always had a bright and cheerful fire there. The station-master said, when he met Samuel in the street, that he'd nab him at it yet. "I don't know to what you refer," said Samuel politely.

One day, as Samuel sat in the reading-room, Herbert Chalk touched him on the shoulder.

"I should like a word with you," said Chalk, in a hoarse whisper, for the rule of the reading-room prescribed silence.

"Would you?" said Samuel doubtfully.

"Over at 'The Railway Arms,'" Chalk added.

"With pleasure, Mr. Chalk," said Samuel, and followed him out.

At "The Railway Arms," the question being put to

him, Samuel said a glass of Scotch ale was what the weather seemed to indicate.

"The fact is, Sammy," said Chalk, "that you and me didn't quite hit it together last season. I dare say I was in the wrong."

"Very likely," said Samuel.

"Well, here's Christmas upon us, and I'm ready to bury the hatchet."

"I should bury it in that dog of yours, if I were you."

"I got rid of him. He took to running and snapping at everybody, and I couldn't stick it. He might have got me into trouble."

"He pretty nearly did," said Samuel. "But so far as my old memory serves me, you were there already."

"Let's forget it," said Chalk. "Christmas is coming. Peace and good will. Next season I hope to be paying you a bob a week regular, besides putting extra custom in your way."

"Peace and good will," said Samuel reflectively. "Beautiful words! And that bob a week? How do you mean?"

Herbert Chalk explained. In the following season a new line of brakes was to run, bringing up visitors from Cowslade to the Hall of Stalactites. This being so, the custodian and his wife were going to enter upon the provision and sale of teas and mineral waters.

"And," said Chalk, "if you told visitors where they could get a good cup of tea, with nice fresh fruit, and everything clean and pleasant, then I'd tell the Cowslade lot that they oughtn't to go back without stepping down to the Bull Inn green, to see the wonderful model and the man that saved forty lives. And I'd pay you a bob a week for advertising us."



"A child could do anything with me at Christmas-time," said Samuel. "I ought to haggle, but I can't bring myself to it. I'd sooner be too open-handed even if I lost money by it. We'll call it a bargain."

They shook hands on it.

"And I think we ought to celebrate it," said Samuel. "We'll have just one more. Let's see, did I pay the last?"

"Oh, it's my turn, Sammy," said Chalk. And he was allowed to take it.

### III

## THE MARRIAGE OF MIRANDA

### I

**I**F we may trust dark and oriental stories, the barbaric king had strange ways of disposing of the hand of the lovely Princess. He would set the three suitors—there were always three—a difficult problem, and the Princess went to the man who solved it. Or he would offer her to the suitor who in the space of certain moons produced the highest achievement. And he never consulted the lovely Princess. Horrible!

In this Christian, civilized, western country, things are far different. The lovely daughter no longer goes to the highest achievement, but to the highest bid. Mamma has seen that romance is here to-day and gone to-morrow, but that really steady incomes are steady. And the daughter is always consulted. At any rate, mamma explains to her more intimate friends that she has at last been able to make the dear child see the thing in the right light. Yes, nowadays the race is to the swift, unless the betting interferes.

The case, therefore, of Eugene Parslow and his daughter Miranda is a little extraordinary, for Mr. Parslow showed himself a reactionary to barbaric methods. He simply put his foot down and said—but we shall come to that in time.

Parslow—you fancy somehow that you know that name. You must have seen it somewhere. And you are quite right—you have seen it on the big posters. A maiden with a red kerchief and a happy smile plucks large apricots in a glorious garden; and underneath is the legend *Parslow's Pure Preserves*. The picture should be taken freely and symbolically; in reality, the people who work for Parslow do not smile much; Parslow does not leave them much to smile about. Exceptions must be made in the case of the manager at the factory, and of Davidson, who had nothing to do with the business and was Parslow's confidential secretary. So good a manager would have been difficult to replace. So specially useful a secretary as Davidson was too valuable to lose. Why, Parslow paid Davidson two hundred pounds a year, with board and lodging, and gave him a fortnight's holiday in the summer and a week at Christmas. As he sometimes told Davidson, he could have got a man for half that sum.

Davidson was specially useful, because he was something more than a secretary. Parslow had not always been a man of great wealth. He was a self-made man, and he knew all about preserves long before he could spell the word parallel. He had made enough money to entertain society before he had learned enough to avoid being ridiculous. Davidson took him in hand tenderly and tactfully. He taught him to speak English. He taught him even a little hotel French, and there came one proud day when Parslow, in the heart of Paris, commanded hot water in the native tongue, and was at once understood. Davidson it was who taught Parslow how to dress himself, and how to behave to the butler. Davidson, in fact, taught Parslow how to live, and Parslow was very grateful, and did

not wish it to be mentioned; but Davidson understood the uses of silence.

Davidson was a clean-shaven, good-looking man of thirty, and had seen more of the world at thirty than Parslow had at forty-five. But Parslow's knowledge of jam had brought him much money, and Davidson's knowledge of the world, with a great university degree as well, had brought him no more than his remuneration, as already stated, as Parslow's private secretary. The thing that annoyed Parslow most was that he could not help feeling a certain amount of respect for Davidson, and that this respect was liable on certain special occasions to become fear and admiration. It was when he was under the influence of this annoyance that he would tell Davidson that splendid men could be got for a hundred a year, which was unkind, or would find fault with Davidson's work, which was unwise. Apart from that, he trusted Davidson more than any other man in the world, including the factory manager.

One morning Parslow came into the study, where his secretary was already seated, with letters in his hand, and an expression of great solemnity.

"Davidson," he said, as he dropped into his chair, "a most extraordinary thing has happened."

"Indeed, Mr. Parslow?"

"It's about Miranda. Now, she's young."

"Very young."

"Bless my soul, it seems only the other day she went to her first dance. And here"—he tapped the letters with a fat finger—"I have by one post received no less than three proposals for her hand."

"Addressed to Miss Parslow?"

"No, sir. No, Mr. Davidson. They have shown a

little more decency than that. They have written in the first instance to me—as is, I believe, the correct thing. I wish my poor dear wife could have been alive now, to have talked it over with me. As it is, I suppose I must decide for myself. In the first instance, decision is easy. It's a proposal from Halliday."

"A decent chap, and a good sportsman."

"But, Mr. Davidson, that's all beside the point. The man's a schoolmaster with a beggarly two hundred and fifty a year, and hopes to be able to make more. Why, the thing's perfectly frantic. I couldn't hear of it for a moment. Now I want you to type a letter to him, telling him not to be silly, and saying in a civil way that I forbid him the house; and I'll sign it."

"I will write a letter, Mr. Parslow, but you must copy the whole of it in your own hand."

"Why the devil should I? What are you there for if it's not to——"

"Certainly," said Davidson. "If you wish to wound the man's feelings, and to make yourself ridiculous, that's for you to decide."

"What? You mean it's not etiquette? Well, have it your own way, then. You may know more about that than I do—my time's been given to more important matters. As for the other proposals, I should answer them in my own handwriting in any case, for"—and here Mr. Parslow's voice became very impressive—"they are both of them baronets."

"Really? Funny coincidence."

"And the coincidence doesn't end there. They are both of the same age, and both have about the same means—no great amount, but, with what I shall settle on Miranda, ample. One is Sir George Firbrook, and

the other Sir Andrew Tangamere. Do you by any chance know anything of them?"

"Yes, the coincidence goes further; I know both men—knew one of them at Oxford, and have met the other at the club frequently. They are both good-looking young fellows, and they're gentlemen."

"Gentlemen? Why, they're more than that. They're baronets. Haven't I been telling you? Well, now, Davidson, I'm no snob, but I confess to a real admiration for old families. I should like Miranda to marry into an old family. The older baronetcy must have the first chance, and I want you to dig around and find out which is the older."

Davidson smiled. "I think I can tell you all about that right away. Neither is what would be called an old family. The first Firbrook baronet was a surgeon, and the first Tangamere baronet was an engineer. Both were Victorian creations, and in each case it is the second baronet who addressed you."

"Ah!" Mr. Parslow seemed slightly disappointed. "Then it's not quite so good as I thought. However, in either case, Miranda will be her ladyship. There is still that. I suppose it would be correct of me to speak of her as her ladyship."

"Yes—if you were speaking to servants."

"I see. Thank you, Davidson. Well, now, what is to be done? There seems to be no reason why I should pick one of them more than the other. Miranda's too young to make an unguided choice. I don't mean to say that she'd take up with a beggarly schoolmaster, like Halliday. She's too sensible for that. But she'll do better under my direction in this matter, as she has always been in others. Only—how am I to direct?"

“Let me think now,” said Davidson. He paced slowly to the window and back, sat down again, and lit a cigarette. “There is an idea which has probably occurred to you. I might draft a letter to your two baronets, telling them of the coincidence, and frankly facing the situation. You can plead that Miss Parslow is still very young, and that a year is not long to wait. It would be more dignified on your part than too ready an acceptance. In a year you would be able to see which was the worthier and better man. Let them see what they can accomplish in a year, and write to you at the end of it.”

Parslow brought his hand down on the table. “Excellent! I will. I had thought of something of this kind. It’s the best idea I’ve had for years. And in the meantime I shall put it to their honor that they make no attempt to see Miranda at all. One must have no advantage over the other. All I shall say to Miranda will be that in a year’s time I shall be finding a husband for her. If you wouldn’t mind, Davidson, you might begin on these letters at once. Capital idea of mine! Capital!”

Parslow walked over to the window, looked out, and backed away again. “Well, I’m shot!” he exclaimed. “There’s that idiot, Halliday, walking up and down outside, waiting for a chance to see Miranda. Davidson, you must let him understand that I won’t have any nonsense of that kind—and, I say, I shouldn’t be too civil, you know. Two hundred and fifty? Oh, tut, tut, tut!”

Parslow then put his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat and posed as his own statue.

## II

THE two most tactful and neatly phrased letters that our celebrated post office ever carried in one day were the letters to the two baronets, in the handwriting of Mr. Parslow and the composition of his secretary. Their replies were speedy, satisfactory, and modest.

"Very good style indeed," said Mr. Parslow as he spread the letters out before him. "Both express a sense that they have been lazy so far, and are diffident about their abilities, but they feel that they ought to do something in the world, and will try their utmost during the ensuing year; and, above all, they address me in a way that I like to be addressed. That's all very promising. Now we can simply put the subject aside for a year, when I shall hear from them again."

"And about Halliday?"

"Don't speak to me of him. He's simply a cad—that is, a man who can't take no for an answer. Here's his letter—about six pages of high-falutin rubbish. I haven't read half of it, and shan't either. My servants have got their instructions, and if I catch him hanging about in the street here, the police will get their instructions as well—if I don't take the law and a thick stick into my own hands." He puffed considerably; he was getting heated.

"But possibly Halliday may meet Miss Parslow at other houses."

"I shall be there too—or my sister, Mrs. Mawby—and we shall know what to do. It won't be for long anyhow, because he'll have to go back to his beastly school. Now then, for a year this subject is entirely



closed. We'd like you to dine with us to-night. Can you?"

Notwithstanding the closure, Davidson thought it worth while to mention a few weeks later, that he heard at the club that Sir Andrew had left England, and would be away for some time.

"Know where he's gone?"

"Cairo, I'm told, in the first instance."

"Ah, that's Egypt," said Mr. Parslow. Davidson resisted with success a temptation to observe that he had guessed it right first time. Parslow added that the work of an explorer or traveller had always commanded his respect.

On the same day Miranda received a long letter from Halliday. The amorous and wary schoolmaster had typewritten the address on the envelope, knowing that his handwriting might betray the letter to her implacable father. Miranda wrote the reply in the secrecy of her own room, and posted it herself, and—I regret to add—never told papa anything about it.

Then the newspapers brought information about Sir George Firbrook. Parslow read with approbation that Sir George would contest West Buncombe. Later came the still more splendid news of his election, and how he had said that he regarded it as a triumph not for himself, but for the principles of—I forget for the moment what his principles were. Later still Sir George was unseated on a bribery petition, and Mr. Parslow observed that one could not be too careful. He had a vague idea that Davidson was in some way to blame.

After that for a long time no word was heard of Sir George or Sir Andrew, until the appointed year was within a fortnight of its conclusion. It was a sunny

morning, and Mr. Parslow was in a sunny humor; business was very good, and the public appetite for the Pure Preserves was steadily increasing. Likewise he had been elected to a club where he might very easily have been rejected, and in this matter Davidson had been of some use. Parslow was chatting genially with his secretary when the blow fell. The blow came in two envelopes, one from New York and the other from London.

Parslow read through the first letter and let it drop from his hands.

"Davidson, that man Sir Andrew Tangamere has married an American."

"Dear me," said Davidson. "These American women ought to be prohibited. They're too dangerous."

"It is no subject for jesting," said Parslow, as he tore open the second envelope and ran his eye down it. "I hardly know how to characterize his behavior, and—good heavens, Davidson, this is from Sir George Firbrook, and he's engaged to the cook at Lord Hazelwell's place, and says that she is a woman much above her station."

"So she is," said Davidson.

"How do you know? I don't know what to say. I really don't. What are men coming to? Where is the spirit of chivalry? They can't even wait for one year. How long was it that Rachel waited for Leah?"

"I don't know."

"You ought to—it's in the Bible. And perhaps you'll tell me where we are now; you had your rotten scheme and badgered me into it, though I knew it was all wrong. What have we got for it? I might have had either of these men. And now, I suppose, you'll tell me that I can marry Miranda to Halliday,

that schoolmaster that you were always backing up."

Davidson rose from his place, and slightly emphasized the fact that he was rather taller than Mr. Parslow. He was very erect, and by this time very serious.

"If you had married her, sir, you would have, at any rate, married her to a man who really loved her, and was not fickle."

"So you're still at it? Like me to write him a letter of invitation?"

"It would be of no use. He sent some time ago a letter of proposal to Miranda, and she refused him as kindly as possible. She did not tell you, because she was afraid you would write a letter which would insult him, and do no credit to your own kindly heart. For it is kindly enough at bottom, and Halliday's one crime was poverty."

"I don't ask you to lecture me, Mr. Davidson. You seem to know everything—including people's cooks. How do you know this? How do you dare to speak of my daughter in that familiar way?"

"I know it because Miranda told me. I speak of her thus because she is my wife. I married her a week ago."

"You utter scoundrel!" He dropped into a chair; his fingers played nervously on his chin. "Oh, you utter scoundrel!"

Davidson smiled charmingly. "But not bad enough to resent the language of my father-in-law."

"You have taken advantage of your position."

"Undoubtedly. That is the way one gets on. Have you not found it so, sir?"

"You have the position no longer. I renounce you altogether. Neither Miranda nor you shall have a penny."

"That is immaterial, but your daughter would like to keep your affection, and I to keep my high opinion of you. I can, of course, no longer be your secretary; in any case, I have other work to do. My uncle has made me a decidedly advantageous offer to assist him in the management of his estates. I married on it."

"And who's your uncle?"

"Lord Hazelwell."

"Then why the dickens didn't you say so before?"

"Well, sir, it didn't happen to occur."

"So Sir George Firkbrook, Baronet, is going to marry my secretary's uncle's cook?"

"It would appear so."

"It's a strange world. My boy, I am going to speak very seriously to Miranda. You have neither of you treated me well. At the same time, when you're face to face with the inevitable—when, I say, you're face to face with the inevitable—then it is so."

But months have since elapsed, and at present Mr. Parslow speaks of "my old friend Hazelwell," and calls his son-in-law Bill. Halliday, on hearing of the marriage, sent a charming letter to Miranda, together with a copy of Byron's works in a binding of intense preciousness. Certain passages in the poems were marked by him in pencil; but as neither Bill nor Miranda has ever opened the book, nor in all probability ever will, that does not greatly matter.

## IV

### THE FAILURE OF PROFESSOR PALBECK

AS a specialist in the cure of imaginative, conversational lying, I have incurred the dislike and distrust of the English medical profession. Because I have no English diploma, and no faith in drugs, I am called a quack. Only the other day a medical paper challenged my right to style myself Professor Palbeck. Well, my name is Palbeck, and I profess to cure conversational lying, and I suppose that a man who professes is a professor. I do not know what more the medical journals want. I do know—and I take this opportunity to remind the medical journals of it—that there is a law of libel and also a limit to my patience.

There are compensations, however, for the persecutions which I have to endure. The handsome silver salver on my sideboard is a testimonial from a well-known golf club. It is inscribed:—

TO PROFESSOR PALBECK,  
IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION OF HIS SKILL  
IN INDUCING  
ALGERNON MUIR McARTHUR McANDERSON  
TO DRAW THE LINE  
SOMEWHERE.

Mr. McAnderson's was, I remember, a very obstinate case, though it yielded to treatment. There was

a bad history: his uncle on the mother's side had been a journalist, and his paternal grandfather had been engaged in the manufacture of gas-meters. Naturally, as soon as Algernon McAnderson took to golf, the taint showed itself.

In addition to the testimonial the golf club paid my fees, which in this instance were considerable. There are many conversational liars in the world, and they make other people sick and weary, and then the other people are glad to pay me to intervene. The material prosperity that has rewarded me is some compensation, and to the gratitude of my fellow-men I attach an even greater value. This gratitude comes more often from the friends of patients than from the patients themselves. But there are exceptions, of course. The wife of a country vicar writes that she will never forget how I taught her to keep a spaniel without writing letters about its instinct to the papers in a manner unbecoming to one who had the temperance cause at heart. I still use the pretty beaded pen-wiper that accompanied her note. Then, in addition to the material prosperity and the gratitude, I have my scientific interest in my work and my happy consciousness that it is a good work. Compared with that, the mere money is nothing.

In one of the cures for dipsomania every article of food and drink supplied to the patient is flavored slightly with brandy; his clothes, his bed, the air he breathes, are made to smell of brandy. One of my cures for lying is on the same principle; the patient is sent to a little country inn, chiefly frequented by anglers and golfers, the local talent being secretly reinforced by my own assistants, professional liars, acting under my direction. In both cures the aim is the

same—by monotony to produce disgust. It was in this way that I cured Mr. McAnderson; gradually, but surely, he became utterly sick of imaginative conversation. For very hardened cases I have a more severe method, also involving the use of assistants. Here also strict secrecy is observed. The patient does not even know that he is being treated, and regards the assistants as the natural product of the society in which he happens to be moving.

Do I always succeed?

I will be perfectly frank in answering that question. If you know any man of sanguine habitual imaginative-ness you may (if your means permit it) send him to me and I will guarantee a cure. The most heroic, illimitable, ebullient liar comes out of my hands as accurate as Bradshaw's time-tables. But I did once fail—though that failure has been the cause of much subsequent success.

I was sitting in my consulting-room one morning engaged in mapping out the work of my assistants—for I had several cases in hand—when my man brought me the card of Mrs. Hubert Spotter. As she had no appointment I kept her in the waiting-room for twenty minutes before I ordered the man to show her in.

Mrs. Hubert Spotter was, as I could see by her dress, a widow. She looked troubled, and wealthy enough to pay my fees. She had a pleasant voice and was rather garrulous.

"Was it about yourself that you wished to see me, Mrs. Spotter?" I asked as she sat down in the chair opposite me.

"Oh, no," she began. "I never—well, the usual—nothing more than anybody else does. You can't

always say just what you mean, or you wouldn't have a friend left. And——"

"Quite so," I said. "You needn't trouble yourself, Mrs. Spotter (and certainly I shouldn't trouble myself professionally), about trivial and occasional inaccuracies. That would be hypochondriacal. No moral constitution is perfect, and if it were it wouldn't be. An entire absence of abnormalities is in itself abnormal. Now who is the friend that——"

"I am sorry to say it is my son—my only son."

"His name?" I inquired, with pencil and note-book in my hand.

"Harold Bitterwood Spotter, age twenty-one."

"Is there—er—a congenital mendacious diathesis?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I mean, has he always been imaginative?"

"No, not at all. Even now he speaks the truth about most things. It's only come on since he took to bicycling."

"I must tell you," I said, "that I have found in my professional experience that the bicycling beginner frequently suffers from a profuse extravasation of mendacity. He says that he learned to ride in five minutes, could mount from the step in ten, and so on. Is that not so?"

"What my son says is that he never learned at all; that he thought out the whole theory of the thing before he touched a machine, and rode right away at once without any lesson or any assistance of any kind."

I gave a low whistle. "Yes," I said, "I am afraid that is serious. And may I ask, do you find in his case that the imaginative habit is general or localized?"

"He talks chiefly about bicycling; in fact, I have noticed nothing apart from that."



“Localized,” I replied; “which is just what I should have expected; a special irritation of the imaginative glands. Well, that is generally quite amenable to treatment.”

“His conversation is simply one string of the most tremendous—of statements that are very much so indeed. He is losing friends by it. A most satisfactory marriage had been arranged for him, and the lady will now break it off. He is spoiling all his chances in life. It is a terrible case.”

“Serious, as I have admitted, but amenable. I prefer—I positively prefer to have the eruption pronounced and well defined. The liar who lies by implication frequently gives me far more trouble. There is more chance for the wild golfing liar, for instance, than for the careful snob liar. In the latter case the disease tends to become chronic. The man who by some accident to his social apex has met a duke once and only once, and ever afterwards speaks of that duke as only the duke’s intimate friends have a right to speak, that man is far more ill than he probably supposes. It *may* take an acute form, and end in company-promoting; but it may go on for years with little change, rendering the unhappy sufferer an object of contempt to all who meet him. Of your son now, from what you tell me, I have hopes. But of course I must see him, and he must have no idea of my purpose. Shall I be, for instance, the husband of an old school friend of yours and dine with you to-night?”

“That would be delightful. Strictly speaking, I am dining out to-night, but I will write and say that I am ill and in bed—I would do far more than that to make poor Harold truthful. The time is very short, but I could find two or three other guests——”

“Not necessary, thanks. I should prefer to meet you and your son alone.”

Mrs. Hubert Spotter had rather a pretty house in South Kensington. As far as I could calculate, she would be able to pay for a course of treatment for her son if it were not expensive or prolonged. The son, Harold Bitterwood Spotter, had more natural dignity than one often finds in so young a man. He was tall and handsome, with tired melancholy eyes. There was none of the vulgar liar's attempt to collar the conversation, and no trace of a noisy and boastful manner. He just waited until the occasion arose and then took it. Quietly and unostentatiously he told lie after lie, without hesitation and without hurry, smooth, massive, effortless lies. But his complaint was confined to bicycling; I do not think he would have told lies on any other subject, not though that subject had been his income and he had been filling up the income-tax return. Only one of his lies—and by no means his best—was about himself. I asked him if he had ever had any bad bicycling accident.

“I had rather a curious escape once.”

“Do tell me about it.”

“Well, I don't want to bore you, and it was nothing very much—only rather curious. Last autumn I was bicycling in Morayshire. I was riding a machine without a brake along a precipitous, desolate road—very foolish of me. For three miles I had been bounding downhill with the machine completely beyond my power to stop. Coming suddenly round a corner, I saw, a quarter of a mile away, a herd of black cattle on the road below me. There must have been at least fifty of them, and they were drinking at a shallow stream which here ran right across the road. In a

fraction of a second I had realized that, what with the cattle and then the stream, I was a dead man, had determined in spite of that to live to the last second, and had rung my bell violently. The brutes started up, but at the pace I was going I was in among them before they could get away. They were mad with fright and dashing in all directions. To this day I can hardly tell how I steered through them. I have a vivid recollection of seeing a great black thing floundering in front of me, and then suddenly finding myself on the other side of the stream—one of the cattle had stumbled and fallen in the bed of the stream and his body had served me for a bridge. I had no sooner got through than the whole herd dashed after me. But, of course, at the pace I was going I soon left them far behind, and in another mile a sharp rise in the road enabled me to check my machine. I saw that I was safe, and immediately fell prostrate in the road. Nervous strain, I suppose. I was trembling so much that I was quite unable to ride back and had to walk my machine."

It was a fair lie of the robust type, hardly a specimen lie, as it wanted finesse. But even at this period I was struck by the manner of his lying. It was beautiful, quiet, and a little mournful. It was not common. I could see that he had a gift. And here I should like to give a word of warning to anyone who may be called upon to judge of the merits and demerits of a lie. Size is not everything. Suppose a man asserts, for instance, that he has swallowed the Albert Hall. There you have size without quality. It is a mere absurdity, with no claim to be called a lie at all. The best lie—that is to say, the worst lie—is that which combines the greatest amount of plausibility and the nearest approach to impossibility without being actu-

ally impossible. Briefly, it must satisfy both the æsthetic and the utilitarian critic.

But I must proceed to describe the methods by which I treated Harold Bitterwood Spotter. I am not in the least afraid of giving my secrets away. Any man may know my methods. But to carry those methods into practice requires a large staff of assistants of tact, secrecy, marked ability, and any social position required; it requires in their controller an audacity, a talent for organization, and knowledge of the world and of human nature, that are not possessed together and in the same degree by any man except myself. No, I do not fear competition.

I owned that I undervalued Spotter. I thought that he might be cured by a simple exhibition of public disproof in conjunction with ridicule. It was easy enough for me to put up an assistant of my own to meet Spotter at the club and take him out on the subject of times and distances. In the presence of my assistant and several other men, Spotter let himself go and gave rambling details of a circular tour ridden by his cousin, who, Spotter said, was rather over the average. My assistant carefully collected the statistics that Spotter from time to time let fall, stewed them down, so to speak, and extracted the result. The result was that—supposing the statistics were accurate—the distance from London to Maidenhead could not be less than two hundred and sixty-three miles, and Spotter's cousin had ridden this distance in fifteen minutes and an unimportant decimal. Where a poorer liar would have succumbed, Spotter triumphed. Firstly, he joined in the laugh against himself. Then he said, "But of course you've got your figures all wrong. Let me go over them again." In the manipu-

lation of bicycling statistics he seems to have been unparalleled. He managed to preserve all the salient, picturesque features of his lie, making only such adroit alterations in detail as rendered the ridiculous deduction impossible.

The next day I received an urgent letter from Mrs. Hubert Spotter. Harold was much worse. In the presence of his uncle, the archdeacon, he had described bicycle polo. The archdeacon had looked much pained and surprised. When was I going to begin the cure? The archdeacon was Harold's godfather, and was quite expected to do something for him; and, Mrs. Spotter added, she could not bear to see her boy sacrificing all his chances in life for the sake of a little imagination.

I decided to get him into a home—that is, to get him to stop for a few days at that country inn. A little tact and suggestion were needed. A man at the club—one of my assistants, of course—mentioned that he had a first-class railway pass to the village in question, could not use it, and would gladly give it away. On the following night Harold Bitterwood Spotter was safe in the smoking-room of that inn hearing two of my experts discuss trick bicycling. He little knew that he was undergoing a course of treatment, but he was. He remained there for a week, and when he returned to London he appeared to be perfectly cured. Mrs. Hubert Spotter wrote me a most grateful letter, from which I quote the following passage:—

“And if it is any comfort to you to know it, dear Professor Palbeck, the blessing of a grateful mother is on your head. Harold is a changed man. He rarely mentions the bicycle, though he often rides it; and never does he allow himself to say anything on the

subject that is not strictly and prosaically accurate. A reconciliation has taken place between him and the younger Miss Black-Brunswick (the lady to whom he was engaged), and he is trying to cure her of a habit of slight exaggeration. The archdeacon was lunching here the other day and turned the conversation (intentionally, I thought) on bicycling. For a moment I was afraid that Harold would be brilliant and imaginative again. But no. I know absolutely nothing about bicycles, but Harold was so dull and was so plainly trying to be interesting that I could see that he was speaking the truth. The archdeacon saw it too, and was obviously much pleased."

For the whole of one week during his stay at the inn Harold had never once heard the truth spoken about anything. A distaste for mendacity had by this means been created. He could not, his mother told me, even endure the usual formula, "Not at home." I was sorry to hear it; the strongest revulsion is rarely the most enduring. To speak accurately, I was *not* sorry to hear it, for the longer the cure the larger the cheque—provided that in a sufficient number of cases you can cure promptly enough to make and keep your reputation. But I was not surprised when a few weeks afterwards I received the following telegram from Mrs. Hubert Spotter:—

"Harold had terrible relapse. Come at once."

I went at once. "Professor Palbeck?" said the butler. "Mrs. Spotter is at home to you." There was a flattering accent on the "you."

I found her alone and almost hysterical. Harold Bitterwood Spotter had broken out again. The archdeacon had written to say that there was nothing to be done for a young man whose conversation consisted

of one long string of cowardly and offensive lies on the subject of the bicycle. Miss Black-Brunswick (with twelve thousand of her own) had definitely broken off the engagement. The committee of his club had written to him to say that representations had been made to them with reference to his recent remarks on the bicycling mile record; that they wished to cast no imputations on his honesty, but they wished him either to resign or to guarantee all hats, coats, and umbrellas that might be in the hall during any period when he was using the house.

"And he is *not* dishonest," gasped Mrs. Spotter. "It is only that his imagination runs away with him."

"Quite so," I said. "Very well; the imagination that runs away must be treated precisely as a horse that runs away. When it has finished running away on its own account it must be made to go on running on account of the driver."

"I don't understand you; and Harold is not a horse," said Mrs. Spotter. In her distress some of her normal suavity of manner had vanished.

"I will explain," I said. "I intend to hand over your son to what I call the Outlying Department. I had reason to suppose, some time ago, that your son was quite an exceptional liar—that he lied for the pure joy of lying and from no base and selfish motive. The braggart liar (one of the commonest varieties) would have been confounded and cured by public exposure. But your son is not a braggart liar. The liar by habit, again, would have been cured by a brief stay in a house where everybody lied, and would have found the habit nauseous. Your son is not merely the habitual liar, for though he was affected temporarily by this manner of treatment he was not cured.

It only needed a strong suggestion to cause the relapse. At a guess I should say that your son had been in some thoroughfare where bicycle shops were frequent."

"True. He was in Holborn in the morning. In the evening we were dining out together, and there was nothing to show that there was anything wrong with him until—I hate to repeat it—but I heard him tell the girl that he had taken down, that that afternoon he had seen a man ride a bicycle backwards through the traffic at Piccadilly Circus. I got him away as soon as I could, and I hope it wasn't noticed much. But, oh, you can imagine my distress! What are we to do?"

"Without the least delay he must meet a finer liar than himself. His spirit must be broken; his pride in his lies humbled; his joy in his best stories turned to bitterness. As I have said, I feared a relapse. I also prepared for it. Within the last two months your son has made the acquaintance of a Mr. Watchet. To your son Mr. Watchet is a barrister and a very good fellow, with no practice, and with private means. As a matter of fact, Mr. Watchet is in receipt of an annual salary of seven hundred pounds from myself. He is in my employ. He is quite the best man in my Outlying Department, and if any man in the world can outlie your son, it is Mr. Watchet. He has great talent—was at one time an interviewer for an American paper, and afterwards took charge of a financial column. I will put Watchet on, and if he fails, then the case is hopeless."

"You couldn't do it yourself?" suggested Mrs. Spotter.

"I cannot lie," I replied.



“Nor I, nor I. Let it be Mr. Watchet, then. Warn him that Harold is exceptional. Tell him to be well prepared beforehand. Don’t let him fail.”

But he did fail. He met Spotter in the street and took him off to dine at the club—Watchet’s club. Spotter had few engagements, and already his friends were dropping off. In the ordinary course Watchet should have called at my office on the following morning at ten o’clock to present his report. At twelve he had not come, and I felt so uneasy that I drove round to the flat where he lived.

“Mr. Watchet is not well this morning,” said the servant. “The doctor has been. I don’t know——”

“Oh, Mr. Watchet will see me,” I replied, and entered his study. The first thing that met my eyes was a large panel portrait of Harold Bitterwood Spotter in the place of honor in the center of the mantelpiece; the next was Watchet, prostrate on the sofa. He was a man of small physique, with pale yellow hair and childish, truthful blue eyes. He groaned to himself.

“Hallo, Watchet! What’s the matter?” I asked.

He raised himself slowly. “Professor Palbeck,” he said, “it’s all over. We left the club at two o’clock this morning; and I have failed. Look!” He pointed to the portrait. “Look, and take off your hat, for that is a master. I persuaded him to send it me. I reverence it. And accept my resignation.”

“Nonsense! You’ll do better next time.”

“No, my spirit is broken. I shall never do any really fine lying again. I can make a living somehow—write a column of racing chatter or something of that kind—but I am not fit for the Outlying Department.” And then he tried to tell me what had happened.

It appeared that Spotter began immediately after dinner with what he called "a curious thunderstorm experience that happened to my friend James Johnson." James Johnson was riding in Devonshire. It was a hot, close, thirsty day, and Johnson (who was a teetotaler) had taken a stone bottle of ginger-beer with him to refresh himself. The roads were lonely, and you might ride for miles without coming across a house or a human being. When Johnson essayed his ginger-beer the cork broke off about half-way down. He found himself unable to force the lower half of the cork into the bottle, and he had no corkscrew with which to draw it out. Johnson was disappointed, but he rode on in search of humanity and the chance to borrow a corkscrew. Just then the storm, which had for a long time been gathering, broke with awful violence. The rain swirled, the thunder roared, the skies were split with lightning. Johnson, who like most teetotalers was a singularly calm man, rode steadily on through the storm. At last there came a blinding flash and Johnson fell to the ground. The lightning had struck, not the man, but the bicycle. Johnson himself was absolutely uninjured. At first sight the bicycle also appeared to be uninjured, but on closer examination Johnson found that the lightning had torn out one spoke and twisted it into a spiral. "This is really very convenient," said Johnson to himself, and without the least hesitation used that spoke as a corkscrew, drank his ginger-beer, and rode on.

On hearing this little story Watchet pulled himself together and remarked that a calm man like Johnson ought to have been able to pass the pin-test for straight riding.

"What is that?" Spotter asked.

"It's in use at some of the best cycling schools. They break an ordinary pin in half and fix the two halves lightly in a plank along which the competitor has to ride. The distance between the two halves is exactly the circumference of the front wheel. The first half is fixed with the point uppermost, and the second with the head uppermost. Therefore, if you ride *quite* straight, the first half punctures the tire with the point, and the second half plugs the hole up again with the head, and you go on as if nothing had happened. A really first-rate man will do the trick twenty times running without missing."

At this juncture Watchet confidently expected that Spotter would give up. On the contrary, Spotter smiled and then said—

"You remind me of what once happened to my cousin. On a downward slope of a hard road, with the wind helping him, he once did a mile in a minute with a hole in his front tire the size of a threepenny bit. At the pace he was going the pressure of the atmosphere prevented the air from escaping and kept the tire fully expanded, on the same principle as the ordinary railway brake."

"Yes," said Watchet, "that would be so, when the hole faced in the direction in which he was going; but when as the wheel revolved it faced the other way, what then?"

"Well, then the force of the wind did the same thing. I told you the wind was in my cousin's favor. You can't do a mile in a minute without a wind to help you, you know."

I consider it greatly to Watchet's credit that he struggled on after this, lying as best he could, until two o'clock in the morning. But I accepted his resig-

nation. I cannot afford to pay seven hundred a year to a man who fails.

I drove on to Mrs. Spotter's house. I changed my tone to her. I said that I had been unable to alter her son, and I was glad of it. He had a great gift, and it would be a pity to spoil it. I would make no charge for my services, and I would gladly employ her son in the Outlying Department at an annual salary of eight hundred pounds. The offer was accepted.

Spotter is invaluable to me. I have mentioned the case of McAnderson. Nothing did him any good until I handed him over to Harold Bitterwood Spotter. McAnderson was a fine golf liar, but he could not stand against Spotter. He came out cured after half an hour's interview. "I went in there," he told me afterwards, "with the idea that I knew what lying was, and I saw that the highest pinnacle to which I could attain was fathomless depth below his feet. He is a master. He does not lie, he soars. I need hardly say that I at once abandon any paltry attempts that I have made in that direction. I am but the smallest star; he is the sun."

Yes, I failed to cure Spotter. But thanks to that failure, I shall never fail again.

## V

### THE 'EIGHTY-SEVEN

**I**N the dining-room at 17 Wilberforce Square, S.W., the Sunday had received its midday consecration. Luncheon had been made dinner, for the same reason that later in the day dinner would be made supper. "We must think of the servants," said Mrs. Trope. She thought of many other things—of the winter sales, for instance, or of the present trouble about Patricia and Edward—but she never quite forgot the servants.

The roast sirloin had passed away, the tart and the Cheddar had followed in their solemn Sabbatical order. Mrs. Trope and her two daughters had retired. There remained now the fruits of the earth in their season—walnuts, to be precise—and the decanters, and Mr. Trope. It was one of Mr. Trope's many good habits to take a glass of port after the luncheon-dinner of Sunday. A silvery-haired gentleman of rather presidential appearance, he paused with the nut-crackers in his fleshy hand—paused and reflected.

There had been an unwonted gloom over the dinner-table, and it had not escaped Mr. Trope's parental eye that Patricia, his elder daughter, had been unable to eat. There was to be an interview with Edward at four, and Mr. Trope foresaw that it would be painful.

But what could be done? Edward was a pleasant young fellow, and old Purdon, his father, had been the intimate friend of Mr. Trope. Edward Purdon

under ordinary circumstances would have been always a welcome guest at Mr. Trope's house. But Edward had been insane enough to fall in love with Patricia Trope. He wished to marry her—and he had three hundred a year. Was Patricia to be taken from the easeful and dignified life of 17 Wilberforce Square, S.W., to be plunged into a penurious struggle and a suburban insignificance? Clearly not. "I'm only doing what I know to be best for you," Mr. Trope had said to his daughter.

"I know," said Patricia, who was heart-broken, but much too proud to weep. "But I wish you wouldn't."

So as he cracked his last walnut, Mr. Trope, being kindly of heart, tried to think of one or two complimentary phrases by which he might soften the blow to Edward. Patricia might go away for a holiday for a while, and he'd buy her a present; she had said some weeks before that she would like a string of pearls, and she should have them. It is not only the cruel who give stones to those who are crying for bread.

The door opened softly, but Mr. Trope did not look round. Parlormaid's are sometimes anxious to begin their Sunday afternoons as early as possible; Mr. Trope had observed it on previous occasions. "It's all right, Willis," he said, "you can clear. Just take my port through into the library, and——"

But it was not Willis; it was Mrs. Trope.

"John dear," she said, "the thought has occurred to me that if we continued her dress allowance——"

"Four hundred instead of three. No, Agnes, no use. She simply couldn't live on it. It's no kindness to let her try. When I married you, I had a thousand a year and prospects—which have been more than

fulfilled. There's a right way and a wrong way. Here's a girl; one day she wants, naturally enough, a string of pearls, which you may call two hundred and fifty sovereigns, and the next day she wants to go off on three hundred a year. Ab-so-lutely preposterous!"

"Of course," said Mrs. Trope, "I don't understand these money matters, and never did. I've been wise enough to leave that to you, John. I'm sure I don't even know how much money we've got. But it is so difficult to know what to do for the best. Poor Patricia! She's gone off to her room, and I'm afraid she really is crying this time, and Martia—you know how devoted she is to her sister—is quite depressed too; she just sits at the piano, without playing anything, and saying that money is nothing but a curse."

"Then she's a very silly child," said Mr. Trope presidentially, "and you can tell her so from me. Why, bless my soul, anybody would think I was going to kill the young man. I'm not even going to forbid him the house—not even that. Patricia will see him every now and then, say once every three months. I'm not obstinate about it. If he sticks to business properly, in another eight or ten years—if they're still of the same mind—he may be in a position to marry Patricia, and nobody will be better pleased than myself. Why, I like the young fellow, and I liked his father before him—an able man, old Purdon, if he'd only have kept clear of speculation. You go and see Patricia, and tell her things are not so bad as she thinks. No engagement of any kind at present, that's all I say. And I'll take my port into the library; Willis will be waiting to clear."

The old gentleman grasped the decanter and his glass with great care, and passed through the door

at the further end of the dining-room. In the library a bright wood fire was burning, and a chair of seductive ease had been drawn up to it. Beside the chair on a low table were the Sunday papers, and there was still room on the table for a decanter and a glass. Mr. Trope lowered himself with dignity into the easy chair.

If Mr. Trope had continued his usual Sabbath procedure, he would have taken two glasses of port, neither more nor less, glanced through one newspaper, and subsided for the space of one hour into a contented and refreshing slumber.

To-day he had too much on his mind to be able to interest himself in newspapers. They remained folded on the table; but he poured out a glass of port, sipped it, and said, "Ah-h!"

What a wine it was!

It was not the oldest port in his cellar, for he still had a comfortable provision of the '78 which he himself had laid down. He had known that grand and historic port, the '47, but that had come to him from his father's cellars. The last bottle had gone now. The wine that he tasted now was the '87, surely, he thought, own sister to the '47.

Mr. Trope had laid down the '87 also, thirty dozens of it. But this bottle did not belong to that original lot. It came from a parcel which he had bought at a sale in '96, and although of the same year, it was of a different shipper. That wise man, Mr. Trope, had decanted it himself.

The real port-drinkers, he reflected with a pious melancholy, were dying out. Men that he knew were proud that they never touched it, thereby showing gross ignorance and a poor, ramshackle physique.



Others contented themselves with that insignificant and emasculated thing, a wood-port; we are a decadent race, and the doctor is abroad in the land.

Mr. Trope sipped again—and again. Yes, it was a queer thing that he should be drinking that bottle of '87; for he had bought it with the intention of giving it back to the original owner. Poor old Purdon! He had watched his books, his pictures, his silver, his cellar dispersed among the people who had the money to buy them. Very good prices had been made, and old Purdon was pleased. All debt would be cleared, and there would still be enough to give Edward a start in life. "Glad you had the '87," he whispered to Mr. Trope, who had only bought it to give it back to his friend again. Before he had the chance—that very night—Purdon was stricken down, and two days later was dead.

So Mr. Trope, in his habitual health, was drinking his dead friend's port preparatory to spoiling the life of his dead friend's son. But that was an absurd way to put it. It was wine he'd bought and paid for (he filled his glass again). And back it would have gone into his old friend's cellar if death had not intervened. He had acted generously, certainly he had. He preferred to act generously.

Still . . . well, a man's first duty was surely to protect his own daughter's interests—to protect her against herself, if need were.

The glass of port winked a ruby eye at the fire. The fire winked a golden eye back at the port again. It was almost as if these inanimate things conversed together.

"Of course, I don't know how much money he has," spluttered the fire. "I only came to-day."

"I know him well," the port winked back. "A very warm man, Mr. Trope. Could afford to do a lot of things that he won't do."

Mr. Trope extinguished that ruby eye by the natural process of imbibition, but still that feeling of Sabbath-afternoon contentment, due to arrive with the second glass, remained out of sight. His wife and daughters had been gloomy, and gloom is infectious. Gloom of the very deepest pervaded the innocent and business-like mind of Mr. Trope.

What did it matter? We gathered things together, an investment here and an investment there, a few dozens of a vintage of this year or that, but they would all be dispersed in the end—by a sale resultant on failure, or by death, against which even success is powerless. We may buy things and pay for them, but they are never our own absolutely; at the most, we are only tenants for life. Thirty dozens of the '87 originally, and eleven that had been old Purdon's—he'd never live to drink it all, never. And he'd no son to inherit it, and girls didn't understand it. Oh dear, oh dear!

It was at this point that Mr. Trope asked himself if he had had his second glass of port. He may, or may not, have known the correct answer to this riddle. But he filled his glass again.

Possibly the breaking of one habit caused another to snap, for Mr. Trope found himself wondering if it was worth while to cling to the last halfpenny till the last moment. Could he buy anything that he would enjoy more than the happiness of those he loved best? The train of thought thus started took upon itself a rosy glow; it warmed and pleased him. He'd do it. Yes, by Jove! he would. And now he would close

his eyes and get those few moments of slumber so valuable on Sunday afternoons to strenuous generous natures who have——

The door opened, and Mary (it being Willis's Sunday out) announced Mr. Edward Purdon.

"Bring another glass, Mary. How'do, Edward, my boy?"

Edward Purdon was rather good-looking, quite manly, very shy, and desperately respectful. When the point was reached, he put his case with most lamentable modesty and diffidence.

"So they've raised you twenty-five, have they?" said papa. "That's satisfactory, as far as it goes. But if I permit this, you'll have to be very careful. You see, your income and Patricia's four hundred together only come to seven hundred and twenty-five. Not much margin there."

"Patricia's four hundred!—I didn't know she had any money, sir."

"I know you didn't. No more did she. For that matter, no more did I until—until quite recently. But it makes all the difference, otherwise I couldn't have listened to you—not for a moment—much though we all like you, Edward. As it is, living very simply, you might be able to manage, and I'm willing that you should try. (The glass, Mary? Oh, yes. Fill it.) And I think there is a toast we might drink."

And with that toast Mr. Trope finished his shameless and irregular third glass of port. And then while Edward was doing his best to say a few of the right things that the occasion demanded, Mr. Trope rose from his place.

"I'll send Patsey to you," he said.

When Mr. Trope entered the drawing-room, Patricia

had a book, her mother had some embroidery, and Martia was seated at the piano; but nobody was getting on with anything, and they all raised hopeless eyes towards the master of the house.

"Patsey," said her father, "there's a young man in the library wants to talk to you."

Patricia gave one gulp. "You don't mean—you haven't sent him away?"

"If you want him sent away, you'll have to do it yourself. I think it's highly probable he'll stop to supper, if you ask him prettily; and if you'd like a string of pearls for a wedding present, I'll think about it."

The next moment Patricia was kissing her father frantically and exclaiming: "Oh, mummy!" and "It can't be true!" and "Martia, Martia!" and the moment after she was in the library.

"Then, dear," said Mrs. Trope, still agape with astonishment, "after all, you're——"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Trope, "I've made some sort of an arrangement which removes the principal difficulty. Give us a tune, Martia."

"If I could only play, sing, dance, and yell for joy all at once, you darling!"

"Dear me," said Mr. Trope, "everybody seems to be very excited."

. . . . .

It all happened more than a year ago.

Mr. Trope's habits have resumed their regularity. The port which is now being taken into 17 Wilberforce Square—well, that is some which Mr. Trope is laying down for his grandson.

## VI

### CLUBS AND HEARTS

#### I

THE quarterly dinner of the Proposal Club was drawing to its close. The club consisted of thirty members, and to-night all were present.

Lord Northberry, the President, at the head of the table, was almost the only man who appeared perfectly calm and genial. On most of the other faces there was a look of anxiety, and even of fear. The critical moment of the meeting, the transaction of the club's extremely curious business, was just about to arrive. Dr. Bagshot, the Secretary, was already fumbling with his papers. The look of anxiety was particularly noticeable on Colonel Seventree, a handsome man of fifty, who was chatting over his coffee with his young friend, Richard Tower. The Colonel's fingers played petulantly with a menu-card, on the cover of which was emblazoned the club symbol, a representation of Curtius leaping into the gulf.

"It's not right, you know," said the Colonel. "It's playing with fire."

"Then why did you join the club?" said Tower.

"Northberry was so confoundedly convincing. You know what he is yourself. Why, it seemed to be almost dishonorable not to join the club."

The Proposal Club is not to be found in Whitaker, and the Secretary, with whom I am personally ac-

quainted, has asked me not to give its address. Its members are all bachelors, and by the rules of the club must be unmarried, sound in health, able to support a wife, and not quite intolerably ugly. At each meeting three names were selected by chance, and those three men were required to make a proposal of marriage before the next meeting. To each member selected was assigned the woman to whom he was to propose, and this woman was always chosen for the improbability that under any other circumstances she would ever receive a proposal at all.

Lord Northberry urged the beauty of it all with great enthusiasm. There was no chivalry, he would say, in loving and protecting a woman whom one wished to love and protect. There was no merit in giving one's heart where it was quite impossible to keep it. But there was merit and there was chivalry in the man who was prepared cheerfully to sacrifice himself for some woman to whom Nature or the Fates had not been kind.

"Besides," the Colonel went on, "I am a gambler. It was a brilliant idea of Northberry's to copy the notion of Stevenson's Suicide Club, but to make the stakes rather bigger."

"Bigger?" echoed Tower.

"Certainly. I have never believed that death is the most important thing that happens to one in one's life. Northberry knows it. The Punishment Committee never kill a man who has broken the laws of the club; they may dishonor him, but they are too clever to kill him. I suppose I've got twenty years or so of life before me. In the course of the next ten minutes it is easily possible that those twenty years will be arranged for me. I shall be told to propose to a certain

woman, and, as you know, the Investigation Committee see that in making the proposal you do your very best to get it accepted. I may be accepted." He leant forward impressively. "Mark my words, Tower, if I'm let off to-night I'll resign. I can't face this again."

"Got your card ready?" said Tower. "I see they're coming round for them." Two servants came down the two sides of the table with salvers in their hands, and each member placed his visiting-card on one of the salvers. The cards were then placed in a covered basket behind the President's chair. The Colonel's hand shook as he dropped his card on the salver.

"Thank Heaven," he began, "it can't be long now. It's the waiting that——"

The sound of a gong rang through the room. Lord Northberry had risen. The servants passed quickly and noiselessly from the room. The Secretary followed them to the door, closed it, locked it, and drew over it a heavy double curtain.

"Gentlemen," said Lord Northberry, "it is time that we proceeded to business. Following my custom, I must point out to you that the business is serious." He lifted a sheet of paper lying on the table and consulted it. "I see here," he said, "the name of Major Delmay, who was last year a member of the club. It was decided that he should propose to Lady Alicia Stoke. The Committee of Investigation had reason to believe that the proposal either had not been made or had not been made in good faith. Major Delmay's expulsion from all his clubs for cheating at cards and the ruin which followed upon him are fresh within the memory of you all. Mr. Archibald Sterne maintained that he had a right to resign after he had been selected

to marry Miss Dorothy Grace Euphemia Smiles. It is a rule of the club that selected members have not the right of resignation until they have executed their trust. Mr. Sterne was subsequently elected for South Loamshire, and it will be remarked that he was unseated on a bribery petition, and was by no means held to be personally guiltless. Mr. Ramsey offended us in a more striking manner by deliberately marrying a young and beautiful lady instead of the woman to whom the club had allotted him. The subsequent elopement of Mrs. Ramsey with a handsome but far from cultured veterinary surgeon made some sensation at the time. It is not safe, if I may use the phrase, to monkey with the Punishment Committee. I will ask the Secretary now to read out to us the minutes of the last meeting."

The Secretary, in a dry, formal voice, read the names of the three members whom chance had selected at the last meeting and of the three women to whom they had been ordered to propose marriage. Two of the men had been accepted and had *ipso facto* ceased to be members of the club. The other man had been refused.

The covered basket in which the visiting-cards had been placed was now brought forward and the cards shaken up. The President raised the cover sufficiently to admit his hand and drew out three cards. Two of the members then investigated the remaining cards to see that no member had omitted to put in his own card or had substituted that of another member.

"If I'm let off this time," said the Colonel, "I'll resign to-night; I swear I will. After all, the chances are ten to one in my favor." Again the President's bell interrupted him.



"I will read," said the President, "the names of the three members selected. The first is Mr. Reginald Holt."

Mr. Holt rose rapidly to his feet. He was a wealthy stockbroker, middle-aged, with a tendency to corpulence. He shook all over, but he managed to stammer out, "I shall do my duty."

"The second name," the President continued, "is the Rev. Marcus Leffingwell."

Mr. Leffingwell answered smilingly and readily. He might possibly be going to be a martyr, but he was a sanguine young man, with a love for lost causes.

"The third name," said the President—he paused and looked in the direction of the Colonel. The Colonel set his teeth and pulled himself together. He sat bolt upright listening intently. "The third name," the President repeated, "is Mr. Richard Tower."

Tower rose and murmured the formula of acceptance in a low voice. The Colonel wiped the perspiration from his forehead and spoke to Tower. Tower did not hear him. He was thinking about a girl in a red tam-o'-shanter. The Colonel touched him on the arm. "You may be all right," he said excitedly; "the woman may refuse you. One man was refused last time."

"Yes," said Tower, smiling in rather a vacant way, and did his best to talk about some other subject. In the meantime the President had consulted the register kept by the Committee of Investigation of those women to whom it was thought desirable and kind that proposals of marriage should be made. If a member was not acquainted with the woman who had been chosen to be his future wife, the Committee of Investigation were always able to arrange a meeting.

The lady who had been chosen for Richard Tower was Miss Agatha Vyse Lamley.

Richard Tower knew her well, and knew that there was very little chance of a refusal. Miss Lamley was a large and energetic lady, who belonged to numerous societies. She wore a pince-nez and was only passably ill-looking, but she had the most disagreeable voice in London.

“Good night, Colonel,” said Tower. “I’m going to slip off now. I congratulate you on your escape. I suppose you’ll be sending in your resignation?”

“I think,” said the Colonel, “I must risk one more meeting. It’s the feeling of relief afterwards—there’s nothing like it. But after next meeting——”

Richard Tower laughed and turned away. Holt was mixing a great deal of brandy with a very little soda-water.

## II

ON the following night, at another house in the same square, Richard Tower and a remarkably pretty girl crept stealthily upstairs. Below them the music and dance went on. Richard Tower knew the house, and knew that the children’s schoolroom upstairs made a very good place in which to sit out a dance. As he switched on the light you could see that the girl was angry.

“I hate mysteries,” she said. “First our engagement was to be secret and I was given no reason; now you tell me that as a consequence of something that happened last night you may be compelled to break off that engagement and marry another woman, whom you say you do not love at all. Again you give no reason.”

"It's awfully hard to explain anything when you can't," said Richard dejectedly.

"Very well," said the girl. "I'm not generally supposed to be an idiot. The engagement is broken off now, and we may as well go downstairs again. I hate you pretty badly."

"You wouldn't if you knew," said Richard. "Do you think I do this because I like it? Do you think I love you a shade less than I did when we were away in the country together? If there was the faintest possible chance that I should ever cease to love you I should be a happier man. The engagement must be broken, as you say. But if I escape—if this other woman refuses me, then I shall come back to you."

"Do, if it amuses you," said the girl. "I shall refuse to see you, of course. Stop where you are, please—I'm going down alone. I'll get somebody to take me home."

Richard Tower was well aware that he was under the close observation of the Investigation Committee. It was necessary to satisfy them of one's good faith, or one came in contact with the Punishment Committee, and they had a diabolical cleverness and were not scrupulous in their work. If you broke faith with the club you were punished by being dishonored. Major Delmay was, in fact, the most honorable of men, but everybody believed that he had cheated at cards. The Punishment Committee had arranged it.

So Richard Tower renewed his acquaintance with Miss Agatha Vyse Lamley, and after a fortnight wrote to her a letter expressing in the most fervent terms his admiration of her and proposing marriage. He had no hope at all. Years before she had, in the most delicate manner possible, indicated a preference for him.

He remembered it with horror. She would accept. And then?

Then he had decided on some painless form of suicide. Things had changed since Lord Northberry had first persuaded him to join the club. He had, for instance, played golf with a remarkably pretty girl who wore a red tam-o'-shanter, and she had quarrelled with him now. He had his last letter to her ready to send, explaining all and trusting that now and then she might have a kind thought for the man who loved her and died for her.

Miss Lamley's reply was brought to him in company with other letters, as he lay in bed. He told his servant to go, and then deliberately opened all the other letters first. This, he felt, was the strong thing to do.

Miss Lamley's letter ran as follows: "There was a time, though I know you never guessed it, when I should have accepted gladly your declaration of love and your appeal that we should share our lives. But now, touched though I am, I know it can never be. I belong to a society of women—in fact, I am the president of it—who have been struck by the numerical preponderance of our sex over yours, and have agreed to sacrifice themselves for their sisters. In a word, we are pledged to remain unmarried, and the penalties for breaking this pledge are of a kind that I dare not face. My sympathy and my help, if you will have it, will always be yours, but I cannot and I dare not——"

Richard Tower stopped reading abruptly. He went round to see a remarkably pretty girl who had said that she would refuse to see him. She might possibly change her mind. One never knows.

## VII

### ONE STONE

SHE believed, as all good women do, that tobacco which has been seized by the Customs is destroyed in a furnace known as the Queen's Pipe, and that auctioneers are in the habit of saying "Going, going, gone!" She firmly held that the liqueur known as Benedictine was made by the monks of that name, and that a good woman has a legal right to keep any property that she may find in the street. She will not, when the time comes, doubt for one moment the genuineness of the long letter signed "*Mater Quæ Scit Aliquid*"—*vide* the autumnal correspondence, entitled "Are Babies Beastly?" in the "Telegraph" for the year after next. She was convinced at all times, on demand and without previous evidence, of the immorality of any artist and the respectability of any member of Parliament.

Her husband, after the manner of bad wise men, never corrected these or any other of her cherished beliefs. In the partnership of marriage a trusting spirit in the feminine partner is a valuable asset, and should be preserved. Why wake up a hunger for facts, scientific but frequently inconvenient? Besides, he may have found from experience that the only thing that made absolutely no mental effect on his wife was undeniable and unimpeachable evidence. It was never

sufficiently picturesque, and it did not seem to her to be quite sportsmanlike.

But the withered relic of an overworked conscience did occasionally disturb him in the matter of Agnes's medicine-chest. Perhaps it was as much selfishness as conscience; he did not like the idea of having to give evidence at the inquest. Perhaps it was also cowardice; he would as soon have ventured to speak rudely to Bimbi, in his wife's presence, as to interfere with the medicine-chest. Bimbi was an overfed Persian cat, of irregular life, uncertain temper, and great beauty, and yet the man did not love her. I am not trying to defend the man; considering what I have to tell concerning him, that would be impossible.

If he considered, as he said he did, that the medicine-chest was a source of danger to Agnes, to her children, to her friends, and to her servants, why did he not check it in its early stages before the passion for keeping a go-as-you-please free dispensary had finally mastered her? It had begun years before, on a peaceful and bright afternoon in June, when Agnes almost thought that she had a headache. Her friend, Mrs. Marston Wells—a charming and sympathetic lady—still had half a bottle left of the only thing that ever did her hay-fever any good. She gave this to Agnes, and one dose cured her completely in three minutes, and she said that she had never seen anything like it. She gave a little to the parlormaid for her chapped hands, and subsequently the parlormaid gave notice. That was the beginning. That was the time when the man ought to have interfered, if he ought ever to have interfered at all. He simply grinned bitterly and let it go, which was unmanly.

Then Agnes began to read advertisements of what

a prejudiced medical profession is wont to call quack medicines. She took those advertisements *en bloc*, net, without reduction. She read how Lance-Corporal Name Suppressed, writing from South Africa—a vague but patriotic address—said that many a time and oft Timson's Tablets for the Tum had stood between him and death. Timson's Tum Tablets were on her washstand or ever the sun had set. They found a fitting partner in Lane's Lotion for the Languid on the following day. From these advertisements she acquired much physiological and therapeutical knowledge. She learned the functions of the pancreas, pronounced it as a dissyllable, and recognized the gravity of life.

Chemists' shops began to have the fascination for her that the public-house has for the drunkard. Even on her way to buy a hat, when every moment is of value—since it may happen that another woman has snapped up the only hat you really want one second before your arrival—she would pause to look at a tempting array of tabloids in phials. She would go on—hesitate—turn back—purchase. It is useful to have these things in the house. Also, as she often observed, one never knows. Likewise, the world is full of symptoms, and if you go to look for them you will find them. Mrs. Marston Wells caught the infection and bought medicines furiously; Agnes at once increased her armament to meet competition. Her collection now occupied a cupboard, always referred to as the medicine-chest. Their method of treatment was very similar. The last purchase was almost always the remedy indicated. Their rivalry was a friendly one; they often met and talked pills together pleasantly. Sometimes an exchange would be effected

—so many chlorate of potash lozenges for a menthol cone. And the trusting spirit grew more grandly brilliant than ever; Agnes was ready to diagnose and treat anything from a chilblain to Landry's paralysis. It was the knowledge of this that made the man anxious.

One morning his mind was so much occupied with a picture of what his wife would look like in the dock that he forgot to put his cigarette-case in his pocket. He discovered the omission with something of a shock in the hall just as he was going out. He put down his hat on the hall-table and went back for the cigarettes. When he returned he found that Bimbi had swept his hat off the table on to the floor, and was now engaged in a patient but fruitless endeavor to get into ambush in the hat's interior. She only succeeded in scratching him once while he was removing her. According to the man's own statement, the cat then fell down the basement stairs. That—or something more or less resembling it—is not unlikely.

At tea that afternoon, just as Agnes was pouring the rest of the cream into a saucer for Bimbi, the man observed with a touch of gentle melancholy that he was afraid that the cat was not well. He was asked to explain himself further.

"Well," he said, "she was going on in a very queer way in the hall this morning. Seemed awfully excited."

"Yes," said his wife, "these Persians have such delicate nervous constitutions. That is why I tell you that you must never speak sharply to her. You must try to remember that Bimbi is not a dog."

The man said that he would try not to forget. "I



suppose," he added, "you haven't got anything in your medicine-chest you could give her."

"But certainly I have. I can see from the way her ear's twitching that she's nervously upset. What she requires is a little bromide. She'll take it in the cream and never know anything about it. I'll be back in a moment."

No sooner had she left the room than the brute to whom she was married took a very small bottle from his pocket and poured a few drops of it into the cream. Then he said, "Good-bye, Bimbi."

His wife had changed the lines of her treatment on the stairs. She returned with a ten-grain antipyrine powder and a digestive globule. She put these into the cream and invited Bimbi to drink. Bimbi with an affected air of bored conciliation began upon the cream, and doubtless would have finished it but for the fact that she had to stop in the middle in order to die. She died with great rapidity and precision.

"Bimbi!" cried Agnes. "I've killed Bimbi."

"Looks like it," said the liar and murderer whom Agnes called her husband. "You ought really to be more careful how you play about with those drugs. Suppose you had given that dose to one of the children."

She was a little late for dinner that night; she had been busy destroying the contents of the medicine-chest, and had not noticed the time.

. . . . .

"I suppose," said this poltroon next morning at breakfast, "I had better look in at the cat-shop some-time to-day, and get you some sort of an animal to take the place of——"

“No, no!” she interrupted. “No cat can ever be quite what Bimbi was.”

Let me do plain justice to the blackguard whose actions it is my painful task to relate. In reply he refrained from saying what he thought. Also he gave Agnes her head in Regent Street that afternoon, and she bought a bronze Buddha, a long turquoise chain, and some India-red matting wherewith to culture the servants' bedrooms—which things are a comfort and consolation in time of bereavement.

And he dropped that little bottle into the canal, and told the man who accused him of looking pleased with himself that he had just killed two birds with one stone. Pressed to explain himself further, he said that he spoke in parables, and that these things were an alligator. What can you say for a man like that? Nothing, of course. Let's say it.

## VIII

### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

**G**ENERAL, age twenty-four, can cook, Christian, clean, honest, obliging, good character, eighteen months in last place—and that's me.

Ah, and a very nice place it was, too. The money were no more than seventeen, and if that's not too little I can swear as it's not too much. But then he were a gentleman, and so were she, and that's a thing worth twice thinking of. Riches is not everything. Why, there's my own sister, kitchen-maid in a house where they're rolling in money, but I wouldn't change with her. The other day, the cook being short of parsley, my sister pops into the kitchen-garden to get some, and there's the master smoking his cigar. "O, damn your eyes," he says, "what are you doing here?" And she, being frightened, says, "It's the parsley, sir." "Well," says he, "you're a pretty little devil, and so you can have some." Pretty she is, too, but I couldn't stomach such treatment if I were her. But there it is—she stops because the cook's took a fancy to her, and teaches her to cook them French dishes. "*Coatlets de mowtun ally refarm*"—there's a name for you, and from what she tells me, nothing in the world but veal chops with a sweet sauce!

No, I preferred my place, and told her so. As I say, he were a gentleman whichever way you took him. He did paint pictures in colors, but then I don't

think he ever tried to sell them. At any rate, nobody ever bought them. Very pretty they was though, and showed he'd got a knack. She was a perfect lady, too, and yet she had a kind heart. And in her evening gown—for it was late dinner every night, though small—she looked more like a photograph than like anything earthly. The house was just a cottage with a piece of garden to it, and handy for boating on the river, to which they were very partial—almost living on that river in the summer-time. Many a time, when he and she were out in the punt, I've stepped into that little bit of garden and seen the sun shining and the spring onions coming through, and it all looked so pretty, and the feeling of pleasantness was such, I wouldn't have called the Queen my uncle, as they say. It were a comfortable place too—all the washing put out, no interfering, no nagging, no scraping, and every now and again the charwoman to help you. Why did I ever leave it?

Well, that was along of William. I means William the canary, and not William the carpenter, who is my young man, and never gave me a moment's sorrow yet, and it would be worse for him if he did.

I hadn't been there more nor my month when she came into the kitchen, and she said about the dinner, which I remember as if it was yesterday, and was lambs' sweetbreads. And then she said—

“Are you happy here, Emma?”

Now, there were a question as I had never had put to me before—your happiness not being a thing as you can expect anybody to care about except yourself. So I were rather taken aback.

“Well, ma'am,” I says, “it's a nice place, and very

kind of you to ask, but take it how you will, it's not as if you kept two of us."

"No," says she, with one of them little sighs of hers, "it's not. Do you find it lonely?"

"Well," I says, "being engaged to William, there ain't so much talk going on at the back-door as there might have been otherwise, which is only right. And yet, when you're single-handed, what you don't say to them at the back-door you don't say to nobody, which is what stifles you."

"Ah!" she says, "would you like to have a pet of your own to keep in the kitchen—a cat or a dog?"

"Thank you, ma'am," says I, "but cats is faithless, and dogs runs to fat when not exercised; but if I might mention it, a canary has always been my ambition. And if that kitchen-window don't seem to ask for a cage to hang on it!"

She smiled and said I should have a canary, and next day she went up to London and brought back the whole thing complete. The cage were handsome, and the bird were pale yellow.

Yes, I was pleased to get it, and I was thankful for it, and I called it William after the other William, and I saw that it took its seed and water, and was nicely kept. But it's a bitter thing to think of now—I didn't value that blessed bird at the first as he should have been valued. We was friendly, but nothing more.

You see, just at first he wouldn't sing, and he may have been a bit shy. But it was more cleverness than shyness. He knew, as well as I knew, that I wanted him to sing; and what he said to himself was, "I'll just see first if the place suits me. If they make it worth my while to sing I'll sing. If not, I'll sulk, and then they'll sell me." It was only natural. Birds

have to do the best they can for themselves, just the same as human beings.

Then all of a sudden one day, as I were cleaning the silver, he give two or three little twiddly chirps, then come hopping along to the side of the cage and looked down at me out of his little sharp eyes, to see how I was taking it.

“Very well, William,” says I. “If you *can* sing you *shall* sing, else no sugar.”

He thought for a minute, and shook his head, as much as to say, “No, I can’t see any reason why I shouldn’t oblige.” Then he hopped down, took a sip of water, hopped up again, wiped his mouth on the wooden perch, cleared his throat, and began. I took his time by the kitchen clock, and he went for seven minutes, and you could see by the way he stopped suddenly, shook his head, and stamped his claw on the perch, that there was a lot more to come only he couldn’t remember it. He’d let himself get out of practice. However, not to discourage him, I gave him a little bit of sugar.

After that there was no more trouble about the singing. He’d found as he could make himself comfortable in the place, and so he meant to stop. And when he once settled that, there was no more hanging backward. And he never had any of that silly vanity that you’ll see in some people, though he was but a bird, while they may have Christian homes and advantages showered on them like water on a duck’s back. There’s many a woman won’t sing at all if there’s much talking going on, though speech is free to all, and we might all speak at once but for the inconvenience. That’s what I call silly, foolish vanity, and setting of one’s self up like a idol. There was

nothing of that about William. He'd sing when there was coffee-grinding going on, and sing the louder for it. Bless his heart!

You may be sure it wasn't long before he and me was as good friends as there was in the world. In a week he'd learned to take hemp-seed out of my fingers. And clever! Well, once I put a bit of sugar in the bottom of his glass, when he wasn't looking, and covered it up with seed. When he'd eaten up the seed on the top, and come across that sugar, he were so startled that he regular jumped. However, I saw him wink one eye, as much as to say, "I must remember this little trick." Next time his seed-glass wanted filling, I did the same thing again. But this time the glass were no sooner in his cage than he went right up to it, dug down through the seed, and fetched that bit of sugar out. But there, if I get talking about his cleverness there'd be no end. As I said to Mrs. Amroyd, which is the charwoman, I said, "It's a comfort to think that if I'm took, and brief life is here our portion, William's clever enough to provide for himself." "Oh, yes!" she says, "carpenters can always make their money," confusing him with the other William, as she was always doing, and in a way as would sometimes bring the blush to my cheek, allusion having been made to the canary's bath which she mistook different.

With the affection I had for that canary, the wonder is how ever I came to leave the door of his cage unhitched. But the front and the back bell going simultaneous, and taking off my attention, I must have left it undone in my flurry. Anyhow, just as me and Mrs. Amroyd was sitting to our teas that bird got out. At first I thought he'd get frightened and beat his

blessed heart out against the window. But not he—he knew too much for that. He came straight down on to the table, and began pecking up crumbs. “Well, Mister Impertinence,” I says, “you know how to look after yourself.” And I held out my finger to him, and he’d have hopped on to it, if Mrs. Amroyd hadn’t happened to give a sneeze, which scared him, though not done malicious. However, he didn’t go far, and he was soon back and at work on those crumbs again. Yes, he had got a cheek and no doubt about it, and I don’t blame him for it neither. For cheek is what gets you on in the world nowadays. Why, if I had the cheek of that bird, I might be the Queen of Sheba. And yet he knew where to draw the line, did William. When I got the cage down, and stood it on the table with the door open, he understood that he’d got to go back, and let me catch him and put him back without so much as a murmur.

After that I used to let him out frequent, seeing as he could be trusted, and the way he’d follow me about that kitchen was one of the seven wonders of the earth, and got to be talked of, too, through the tradesmen’s carts having seen it with their own eyes when calling at the back-door. He was a regular proverb in the place, William was, and if he’d been my own son I couldn’t have been more proud of him. The only anxiety I ever had about him was along of Mrs. Chalk’s sandy cat, which would sneak round my kitchen-windows by the hour; and that were soon over.

Keep those windows shut always you couldn’t. For it takes a fire to roast a joint in the summer just as much as in the winter, and living in a Turkish bath is what no Christian could be asked to do. Still, it



gives me a feeling of nervousness, knowing as cats are artful. And that sandy cat were a bit too artful for his own safety. One morning I had just come down from the upstairs room, and with my hand on the kitchen door I heard a crash. I rushed in and saw what it was. The cat had got in at the window, and made a jump for the cage. In half a second I had shut window and door, so that Mister Sandy couldn't get out. Then I had a look at William and saw that he wasn't hurt, only frightened. And then I picked up the poker, and the next ten minutes kept me busy.

I had to report a vegetable-dish and two wine-glasses broke, but I didn't grudge them. The cat I buried that night, unbeknown, back of the rhubarb. Questions was asked, and answered in a way as you might call putting off. That is, Mrs. Chalk says to me, "Have you seen our sandy cat?" I says, "Yes, I saw him in the garden last night." So I did. That was when I was burying him. She said, "You didn't throw stones at him, nor do anything to scare him away, for he's lost?" "No," I says, "I wouldn't do such a thing." And no more I would, for where's the sense in throwing stones at a dead cat? "Why," I says, "he may stop in the garden for ever, for all I care," which were the solemn truth, though artful.

As I said, William wasn't hurt, but he'd had a nasty shock. For weeks he was that shaken you couldn't get him to stir out of his cage. And when he did venture out at last, the least little noise seemed to put him all of a flutter. However, time and patience, and good feeding, brought him round. He were such a companion to me as you wouldn't believe. Every morning as soon as I were down, he'd start chattering to me. Often and often I've told that bird things as I

wanted to say, but wouldn't have told to no living human being; for I knowed he wouldn't pass them on, or even let slip hint of them accidental, which is what the best of us is liable to. And he looked at you that intelligent, when you was talking, you could see as he understood every word. If you stopped, he'd give a sort of chirrup, as much as to say, "Well, go on. What next?"

For two years he were a joy and a comfort to me, and then he were took. He got a bit of a cold somehow, and I give a shilling to a wöman I knew with experience in fowls to come and have a look at him. As soon as she saw him, she says, "We'll do all we can do, but it's more serious than you think. For what he's got is congestion of the chest, to which all them foreign birds is partial." Well, we gave him medicine, and he took it, for to the last he'd eat or drink almost anything, such was his desire to please. And he were well nursed, too, and I'd bank up the kitchen fire to last through the night, and never grudge the coals. A comfort to me, too, it is to think as everything was done, for one night I could see as the end were near and sat up with him, and at half-past eleven he were stone dead, if ever a bird was, and me broken-hearted. I wore black for him, too, which was the same I had when my aunt was took, and that started Mrs. Amroyd. "Why," she said, "to put it on for a bird, it do seem to me downright irreligious."

"Yes," I says, "he were only a bird, nor born to any high estate, as the hymn says, but he were a better friend to me nor ever my aunt was, which was wrangling from morning till night. And so the less you says, Mrs. Amroyd, the better for all parties, or you may

live to lose a friend yourself, which would be only a judgment."

And of course I give notice. I couldn't keep coming into that kitchen where he'd always been, and never would be any more, not though it had been a king's palace. So I said as I'd leave at the end of my month, and no entreaties, nor the offer of another canary, though well meant, could move me. I was sorry to part with them, and sorry to leave the place, but it had to be.

Ah! I shall never find another place like it. As a rule, a gentleman has money, and then he don't do on one general. All I has to look forward to is over-work, under-feeding, and nagging, and miseries. But all the same, I couldn't stop after William had gone.

What the other William says is, don't take a place at all. For the way he looks at it, if you makes your Christmas holiday your honeymoon, that's all a saving, and to be thought of when a couple ain't Rothschilds and the Bank of England, which I don't deny is sense.

However, that's a thing as needs thinking over. Still, he had the canary stuffed at his own expense, and give me in a glass case, and that's a sign of a feeling heart. I dare say as I might do worse.

## IX

### THE BOY AND THE PESSIMIST

“WELL,” said Mr. Archibald Bunby, M.A., principal of that excellent preparatory school, Redhurst, “there the matter stands. You can take it or you can leave it, and if you leave it I’ve very little doubt in my own mind that Gibbing will take it—snap at it, in fact. If you take it—you aren’t obliging me in any way—you remain at Redhurst during the holidays, and in return you receive your board and lodging free and a five-pound note at the end of it. Why, man, you aren’t even asked to do any teaching; all you have to do is to keep an eye on the boy generally. And, so long as you don’t smoke actually in the presence of the boy, I will relax the smoking rule. I’d sooner you took it than Gibbing, because I consider you to be the more trustworthy man, but there’s no obligation about it. On the contrary, I am offering you an uncommonly good thing for yourself. There’s scores of men like you who’d be only too glad to get a holiday engagement on any terms.”

Yes, that was true, and Elton knew it. And it was of some detestable importance to him that he should not have to keep himself for seven weeks on his term’s salary, but, on the contrary, should find that salary augmented by five pounds.

“Very well,” he said, rather despondently—he gen-

erally seemed rather despondent—"I accept. Rough on the boy, rather, isn't it?"

"Well, what else is to happen to him? He can't go to his people in India. He can't go to his uncle's house, because they've got the whooping-cough there. If Maynham caught it that would mean losing a term's work—and it's most important that he should not lose even a day's work just now. As I said, I don't ask you to teach him anything during the holidays, but still a little grounding in Latin grammar—Latin grammar especially—wouldn't do the boy any harm, and might help to pass the time for you."

"Very well," Elton repeated.

Bunby was not quite satisfied. He wanted gratitude. He would always do anything to get gratitude, except deserve it. He paced up and down his study, stroking his red beard. "You'll be very comfortable, you know," he reminded Elton. "You'll have the assistant-masters' sitting-room all to yourself, and Maynham, of course, will play about in the day-room. Every now and then you'll just see that he's going on all right, of course. As for meals, you'll have them together, and—though there'll only just be you two—they'll be on exactly the same scale as during term-time. Ah! I wonder if you know how the under-masters are fed at some private schools?"

Elton bit his lip. It galled him rather to be made to feel like a canary.

"I could give you cases," Bunby went on, "but, however, I'll say no more. It's understood that you stop, and it seems to me that it's a very nice little windfall for you."

Elton gave him the thanks he wanted, feeling that he wouldn't be happy until he got them. He had got

into the habit of doing anything he could to please Bunby. He was paid to please Bunby.

Then Elton went back to the assistant-masters' sitting-room. Gibbing, the English master, was there making cocoa over the gas. To him Elton related how Bunby had made the offer, and he had accepted it.

"Poor devil!" said Gibbing.

"Poor devil yourself!" retorted Elton, irritably. "When I want your pity, I'll ask for it."

"Kettle's boiling," said Gibbing, unmoved. "Have a cup?"

"No," said Elton, turning his back on him. He was not paid to please Gibbing.

Gibbing explored the bottom of the cocoa-tin with a spoon. It returned barely full.

"It's just as well you won't," he remarked. "I believe these beastly servants sneak our cocoa when they do the room in the morning."

"They never do 'do the room' as you call it," replied Elton. There were moments when he realized just as acutely as if it had been perfectly new to him, the hopeless sordidness of the life. He had come upon one of those moments now; he felt crushed, and yet rebellious; angry, and yet humiliated. For the sake of five pounds he was going to surrender seven weeks of his independence, and become a kind of male nursemaid. And it was for this that one took a degree at Cambridge! He did not at the moment feel well disposed towards Maynham. He relieved his feelings by being distinctly offensive to Gibbing, who drank his cocoa and paid very little attention to the offensiveness.

The morning of the general departure came. Before it was light the heavy luggage carts were crunching

the gravel drive; the trunks had all been piled in the hall the night before, surveyed with satisfaction by many small boys as evidence that the holidays had really come at last. There was an exceptionally early breakfast for two or three boys that were to catch an exceptionally early train. Then, an hour later, the majority followed with their coat-collars turned up and joy in their hearts, and calculations of the amounts that they would save out of their travelling money in their heads. Later still, Gibbing also went, having himself conveyed to the station in a two-shilling fly, because the boys walked, and he thought it well to mark distinctions. Last of all, after many and minute instructions to Elton, Mr. Archibald Bunby drove off to his favorite holiday occupation of being a bore in a boarding-house—there were half a dozen of these establishments, in as many seaside resorts, that shared in and dreaded his patronage. He liked to collate them; his favorite study was comparative price lists.

Elton sat up in the assistant-masters' sitting-room. He was smoking the first pipe of the holidays, which was something; Gibbing was gone, which was also something; Bunby was gone, which was even more. But, on the other hand, he himself was remaining, and the many orders that Bunby had given him rankled in his mind. He pulled out one of his own visiting-cards. On it was engraved "Mr. Eustace Elton." He added the letters B.A., in pencil, and underneath the name wrote "Caretaker and nursemaid in the service of Archibald Bunby, Esq." He surveyed this with a sort of grim satisfaction in insulting himself, and then dropped it on the fire and swore under his breath. The clock on the mantelpiece struck five, and reminded him that it was tea-time. In the big

dining-hall there were three long tables. In term-time they were filled; now Elton and Tommy Maynham had the place to themselves. Their voices rang strangely in the empty room. A small white tablecloth, spread across one end of one table, was an unusually unattractive oasis in a desert. Tommy was not a particularly beautiful boy. His countenance was cheerful, healthy, and freckled. He was popular, simple-minded, and knew more about birds' eggs than he did about books. Elton supposed that he ought to say a word or two to the boy, although he did not want to encourage him to chatter all through meals.

"Well, Maynham," he said, "they've left us behind, haven't they?" Tommy beamed. "You don't look much put out about it, anyway."

"No, sir," said Tommy; "I've had rather a good time. I got three rides on the luggage carts, and as Mr. Gibbing's cab was coming back from the station the man gave me a lift, too. That makes four rides and nothing to pay. One would sooner have gone, of course. Wouldn't you?"

This was unfortunate, because it reminded Elton of his servitude.

"But still," Tommy added, "there's lots of things one can do when one's alone. I dare say it won't be so bad."

Elton had brought an English translation of a volume of Schopenhauer down to tea with him. He opened it and began to read. Once or twice Tommy ventured on a remark, and Elton answered in a slightly absent-minded kind of way. At the end of tea he said to Tommy:

"Look here, Maynham, during the holidays you can always bring a book in at tea or dinner if you like."



Tommy thanked him. Reading on these sacred occasions was strictly forbidden during term-time, and the removal of any prohibition was to be taken as a treat. This idea was so firmly rooted in Tommy's mind that he almost forgot that he much preferred talking to reading.

Mr. Archibald Bunby had, before he left, told Elton that breakfast would have to be an hour later during the holidays.

"The servants have suggested it, and if I don't make things as easy for them as I can while I'm away they'll leave, or want more wages, or something. So you'll breakfast at nine. And I say, Elton, don't ring for anything if you can help it. It's only a few steps from the dining-hall to the kitchen, and you can very well go yourself if they've forgotten anything."

Elton now passed this information on to Tommy, with such modifications as self-respect demanded.

"I've told the servants, Maynham, that we won't breakfast before nine. I never do in the holidays, myself, and I dare say you won't object to an extra hour in bed."

Here was a further relaxation, and another good reason why Tommy should have felt pleased with the way things were going. His uncle had written to him to cheer him up, and console him for his stay at Redhurst during the holidays. The letter had contained a remark that "When things seem bad, there's all the more reason for making the best of them," which was perhaps sensible; it also contained postal orders for two pounds, which was certainly lavish. Tommy had naturally a contented disposition. He had also an inventive mind, and for days past he had been devising occupations for his solitude in the holidays.

After tea Tommy went off to the day-room. It was a large room, furnished with two long tables, four long benches, a set of lockers, and one chair—all in pine wood. It also contained a piano, in walnut, but out of tune, for the benefit of those boys who took music. The room was warmed by hot-water pipes. It looked out on the back wall of Mr. Bunby's stable, and it was not particularly cheerful.

It was lit by gas jets without globes, two as a general rule. The servants had—by Mr. Bunby's directions—only lit one of them that night. It had been clear to Mr. Bunby's economical mind that where there was only one boy, luxury itself could not demand more than one gas jet. Tommy, not having an economical mind, struck a match, got on a chair, and increased the quarterly gas bill. Then he took from his locker a copy of "Hymns Ancient and Modern," with tunes, and three sticks of plain chocolate. He opened the piano, drew the chair up to it, and put the three sticks of chocolate on the lowest octave, because it would be handy there, and that octave would not be required for the purpose for which its bad German maker had originally intended it. Then he sat down, found the tune that he was anxious to learn before Christmas Day arrived, and set to work. It was only recently that Tommy had "taken music," but he had already found out some important facts in connection with it. He knew, for instance, that it was really the right hand which did most of the work; the right hand did the actual tune, and if that went wrong it was of very little use for the left hand to be perfectly correct. Whereas, if the right hand knew its work and made enough noise with it, the left hand might come in gently where it would and as it could. So he began

now to learn the right-hand part first. He put the soft pedal down, and struck the notes as gently as possible, because he did not want Mr. Elton in the masters' room overhead to hear the tune; it was to be a surprise on Christmas Eve—supposing that it could be got into good going order by that time. As a matter of fact the precaution was needless; the tune, in its embryo stage, might safely have been audible as it would certainly not have been recognizable.

At nine o'clock there was supper, and, as Mr. Bunby frequently pointed out, all the best doctors are agreed that this meal, if taken at all, should be as light as possible. After supper Elton read prayers, omitting two somewhat lengthy petitions, for "a steady and conscientious application to our studies," and for "such pleasant and friendly intercourse with our comrades as may best tend to promote," etc., etc. These were, he considered, only applicable in term-time. Mr. Bunby had composed these prayers himself, and it is greatly to be feared that Tommy regarded their abbreviation as one more of the relaxations that the holidays had brought with them.

Then Tommy went off to his bedroom, read "Treasure Island" for half an hour by the light of one surreptitious candle, and finally dropped off to sleep. Elton, in the masters' room, sat before the fire, pondered, and pitied himself.

It was going to be terribly lonely for him. In consideration of his board and lodging, and a fraction under one shilling and threepence *per diem*, he had sentenced himself to absolute solitude. There was Tommy, of course, but Tommy did not count; or rather, Tommy made things worse. All through the term there were many Tommies; the chief point of the

holiday was that they brought with them a complete absence of boys. That point was lost, for he would certainly have to suffer Tommy's presence at meal-times, and he would also be expected to exercise some sort of slight supervision of his movements during the day. That was what a man of intelligence and education and taste was compelled to endure in order to secure for himself the paltry privilege of being allowed to live. Was it worth while? Emphatically not; he would have preferred to die, but being a victim to the primary instinct, he went to sleep instead. He also read in bed, but his book was the English translation of Schopenhauer, and it was on the floor in ten minutes.

"What are you going to do with yourself?" he asked Tommy on the following morning.

"My old stamp-book's come to bits," replied Tommy, "and I've got a better one that was a present. So I'm going to float off all the stamps out of the old one, and put them——"

"Yes, yes, I see."

"The chaps being away, I can get all the lavatory basins at once for floating the pages in, and that keeps the stamps from getting mixed. I can have all the basins, can't I?"

"Yes. Don't make any mess, though; and don't go out until I return."

Then Elton sauntered down into the town, smoking openly the cigarette that in term-time was prohibited. He examined the shops, with their Christmas cards, Christmas toys, Christmas turkeys. And, as he did so, a very great idea came to him. He would occupy his leisure during the holidays by the composition of a long, satirical poem, to be called "Christmas Re-

viewed." By the audacity of its manner of dealing with a sacred subject, by its fierce and concentrated bitterness, by its marvellous melancholy, and by its exquisite finish, it should attract attention and appreciation. Such things would be worthless to a man without illusions, but he was prepared to work hard to secure them. He went into the best stationer's shop at once.

"Have you," he inquired, "any hand-made writing-paper, with the rough edge, you know? Letter size? It might be scribbling or letter—but not folded as letter."

The stationer reflected, touched his forehead, beamed with sudden recollection, and was off up a ladder like an adventurous monkey in a black coat. Down he came with his dusty prize, blowing it, smacking it, active and business-like. A touch and a jerk, and the knot that only business could tie was loosened as only business could loosen it. The soiled covers fell apart; there, in creamy whiteness, with rough edge, was "an article that I've had no inquiry for, sir, for years."

After this, as the days went on towards Christmas, Elton saw less and less of Tommy Maynham. The boy was well-behaved, apparently, and did not require supervision. Absorbed in his composition, Elton hardly noticed him; sometimes at meals the boy would speak to Elton, and Elton's answer would come after a lapse of minutes, or not at all. It was not, as Tommy supposed, that the master wished to snub the boy, but only that Elton had in the carrying out of his very good idea become somewhat absent-minded. If he had noticed the boy at all, he would have noticed that his cheerfulness and activity were fast vanishing. The

stamps were all correctly arranged in the stamp-book now, "Treasure Island" was finished, and Tommy's order for another of the same brand was still the subject of apologies from the bookseller.

"Here, have you got my book yet?" asked Tommy; "and if you haven't, why the dickens haven't you?"

The bookseller referred to "the delays in transmission inevitable during the pressure of business prevalent at this season of the year."

Tommy remarked "Skittles!" and walked out of the shop.

He would not so much have minded having next to nothing to do if he had only had somebody with whom to do it. Not being analytical, he grew dull and dejected without being conscious of the reason for it. The day before Christmas Day cheered him up a little. A hamper arrived for him, containing much that was edible, and a Jules Verne that was readable. There were letters from India, with Christmas cards and postal orders in them. There were letters from his cousins; there were sundry small packages containing presents. He himself was busy with the sending of letters and cards, and with a final rehearsal of that tune he had been so anxious to learn. The treble of it had by this time been brought to a satisfactory condition, and a great deal of the bass was only a very little wrong. On the whole, the prospects of making it a proper Christmas seemed to him much better than they had done the day before.

That night, when Tommy went up to his bedroom, he did not go to sleep; on the contrary, he adopted precautions to keep himself awake. He drank cold coffee of exceptional strength made to his order by a local confectioner, and brought up from the shop in a

medicine bottle. This, in conjunction with the excitement of the Jules Verne, kept him from sleep until eleven o'clock. It was at that hour, he remembered, that the waits generally began at home. He went downstairs to the day-room, lit (as though there were no such things as gas bills) both the gas jets, opened the piano, arranged the music, clapped down the loud pedal, and commenced. He played hard and he sang hard. Tommy's rendering of "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing" could be heard distinctly—as he intended it to be heard—all over the building.

"Now this," Tommy thought to himself, "will be a surprise for Mr. Elton."

It was. Upstairs in his own room Mr. Elton could hardly believe his ears. Here was, apparently, an open defiance of rules and discipline. He put down the manuscript of "Christmas Reviewed," now approaching its maturity, and dashed downstairs to the day-room.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked angrily.

Tommy smiled, turned round on the music stool, and explained.

"I was going to have asked permission," he said, "only I couldn't, because it was meant to be a surprise for you, sir, and I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Not mind a row like this past eleven o'clock at night! What are you talking about?"

"Well, sir, the boy that does the boots told me that the regular waits never came up here, because Mr. Bunby never gives anybody anything."

"You've no business to be chattering to the boot-boy at all."

Tommy's real excuse—that during the greater part of the day there was absolutely no one else to whom

he could talk at all—seemed to him too silly to put forward.

“I don’t often do it,” he pleaded. “We always have the waits at Christmas, and that gave me the idea. I didn’t mean to do any harm.”

“Very likely, but you must please remember that rules are rules. You’ve given me no trouble so far, and I believe that you didn’t intend to give any now. For that reason I shan’t punish you. Now shut the piano, and run back to your bedroom. And another time try to think before you do anything.”

Tommy thanked him, said good night, and went off to his room. It was all a failure, and he wished that he had never thought of it. Christmas was not beginning very well.

When Elton came down to breakfast on the following morning, he found a white envelope on his plate. Tommy, looking rather self-conscious, watched that envelope out of a corner of his eye as Elton opened it. It contained a Christmas card. On one side was a picture of a small church and a hard frost; on the other was written, in a boyish hand, “With love and best wishes from T. Maynham.” Elton glanced at it and put it down. He never sent cards himself, and did not like receiving them.

“Very pretty,” he said. “Thank you, Maynham. The compliments of the season to you.” Then he relapsed into silence and Schopenhauer. When he got up from breakfast he forgot to take the card. Tommy brought it to him just as he was leaving the dining-hall. “Ah, thanks!” said Elton. “I’m always forgetting my letters, you know.” But this did not reassure Tommy; he knew that the card was, like the hymn-tune, a failure. Elton sauntered upstairs to his own



room, and dropped the card into the waste-paper basket. Tommy went to church alone that morning. Elton explained that he had an incipient cold, and thought it would be better for him to keep to the house that morning. As a matter of fact, he wished to finish copying out that bitter satire, "Christmas Reviewed." It would be an additional point if it were finished on Christmas Day. As he began work, an uneasy idea flashed across him that he might just as well look after Tommy a little bit more, and make things pleasanter for him. Tommy apparently took Christmas very seriously, and would like a little more sociability. He made up his mind to encourage Tommy to talk at dinner, and, perhaps, spend a few minutes in the day-room with him afterwards. Elton was not an unkind man, only rather vain, rather selfish, and frequently forgetful. By the time that the dinner-bell rang, he had forgotten all about Tommy, and had worked up his dejection and detestation of life (by close application to "Christmas Reviewed") to such a pitch that he neither wanted to talk to anybody nor see anybody.

It is to be feared that that dinner must place Tommy in no heroic light. Christmas dinner was, in all of Tommy's previous experience, a banquet. Tradition demanded that there should be turkey in it; the boot-boy had told Tommy (though a superficial knowledge of Mr. Bunby should have taught him better), that he was pretty certain it would be turkey; Tommy had expected turkey. He had pictured it carved liberally by a smiling master (now at last awake to the joviality of the season), and handed to a rejoicing boy. He had decided to ask Mr. Elton that excellent riddle about Turkey and China, which Tommy's uncle never failed to propound on due occasion. Why, the mere

eating of the turkey would be a mystic bond of union between himself in exile and his people at home. Five minutes before dinner his imagination plainly detected the very smell of turkey.

And it was a leg of mutton! Elton carved it, without seeming at all conscious that it was wrong, or even conscious that Tommy was present. It is an authenticated fact that thousands of starving families would have welcomed that leg of mutton, and that some religious orders habitually take their meals in silence. Tommy, being neither a starving family nor a religious order, but merely a wretched boy, for the first time in his life refused a second help. And then came a rice-pudding and more silence. It is an authenticated fact that some whole nations live almost entirely on rice. It is singularly nutritious.

Then Tommy rose and said with fair steadiness: "May I go, sir? I'm not well."

"Certainly," said Elton. Of course, Tommy's people had sent him a hamper, and the boy had eaten too much. Pig! Well, it was all a suggestion for "Christmas Reviewed."

Elton finished his dinner leisurely and then supposed that he would have to go and look after the disgusting little beast. He found him in the day-room. The disgusting little beast was sitting with a book in front of him at the further end of the table. His head rested on his hands, and when Elton entered he turned away as much as possible.

"Well, Maynham, what's the matter?"

"I'm all right now, sir," said Tommy.

It did not sound like the boy's natural voice. Elton came further into the room, and then saw that Tommy

was crying. He went up to him and took him by the shoulder.

"Why, Maynham," he said, "this doesn't look as if everything was all right."

"I wish it wasn't Christmas," said Tommy, and continued crying. "But I'm all right," he added.

Slowly and incoherently, in reply to Elton's questions, he told what was the matter. He spoke of what he had been used to do at Christmas. It was loneliness that was the matter—loneliness, and neglect, and unfriendliness, amounting to contempt and even cruelty. Tommy did not accuse Elton of any of these things; he did not seem to think Elton had behaved badly to him; yet Elton was sufficiently intelligent to make deductions. To feel that he was an unhappy man had brought him a kind of melancholy pleasure; to feel that he had been a brute brought him no pleasure at all. And, though Tommy's only specific accusation was against the leg of mutton, it was Elton who stood condemned—felt it—knew it.

"Well," said Elton, "I'm glad you're not really ill, because I wanted you this afternoon."

"Wanted me?"

"Yes, I've had a lot of work on hand these last few days. But I shan't work on Christmas Day, and, besides, I'm sick of being alone always. If you're not too keen on your book, what I should really like would be a game of draughts. Only, I haven't got a board."

"I have," said Tommy. "Shall I get it?"

"Do."

"It's in my room. I'll be down with it in a minute."

"Oh, we won't play here," said Elton. "This room isn't very comfortable. Come to my sitting-room."

The masters' sitting-room was not luxurious, but it

was a paradise compared to the day-room. It was a paradise which no boy at Redhurst had ever yet been allowed to enter. Here was an invitation that was honor, indeed. Tommy was effusive in his thanks.

It took Tommy two minutes to find that draught-board. During these two minutes Elton had time to get to his room, fish Tommy's card out of the waste-paper basket, discover that it would just fit the frame that now held a photograph of Gibbing's sister, remove the photograph and substitute the card and place it in the center of the mantelpiece. Tommy's eyes lighted on it as he came into the room.

"Why, that's the one——" he exclaimed.

"Yes, we've given you the place of honor. Wonderful, that frost effect is!"

"And it's just done with glue and powdered glass," said Tommy. "I could do it myself."

"But you can't beat me at draughts. Come along with you now."

Elton intended to let Tommy win the first game. Tommy saved him the trouble by taking it. Then Elton decided to win the second game himself, played carefully and lost it. Elton had not played since he was a child. He had scored one game to Tommy's five, and they were in the middle of the seventh when the tea-bell rang.

"Why shouldn't we have tea up here?" suggested Elton. "Run downstairs and fetch the things up, and we'll make a picnic."

This was the sort of thing that Tommy liked; any boy prefers an irregular to a regular meal. Tommy, rather shyly and apologetically, added a cake, "Which they sent me, and it isn't half bad really, sir, if you'd try it." Elton tried it, and was enthusiastic.

“Are we going to have any waits to-night?” asked Elton, smiling, just before supper. “Come, Tommy, let’s have the performance now, at a reasonable time.”

So the tune came in seasonably after all, and if the left hand did omit the more difficult chords and play the easier ones wrong, neither Tommy nor Mr. Elton seemed to consider that this at all detracted from the general effect. Tommy went to bed radiantly happy. It had not taken much to make him happy.

When Tommy had gone to bed, Elton so far disregarded Mr. Bunby’s direction as to ring the bell and ask for the cook. She came, astonished, somewhat flustered.

“Cook,” said Elton, “we must have a turkey for dinner to-morrow.”

Cook was sure that they ought to have it, too, only Mr. Bunby wouldn’t hear of it, and if he saw turkey in the dinner-book—well, there! Let alone Orley, the poulterer, being shut on Bank Holiday. She was sorry, too, she was. But Mr. Elton knew what Mr. Bunby was—oh; most careful! and—well, there!

“Look here, cook,” said Elton, “this is a sovereign. Mr. Bunby need not pay for the turkey, and Orley will not risk losing your custom for twenty Bank Holidays. Get the turkey, keep the change for a Christmas box, and the compliments of the season to you.” Next day the turkey arrived all right. In the dinner-book the cook made the entry “Mutton chops,” and hoped that it was no acting of a lie—which, however, it was.

Elton found that he had enjoyed the latter part of that day more than he had enjoyed anything for some time. His nature had not changed, but his point of view had. He saw himself less as a master and more as a man. And during the rest of the holidays he did

his best to wipe out from his memory (and Tommy's) his recollection of himself as a brute.

One night at the end of the holidays he came across a poem on hand-made paper, entitled "Christmas Reviewed." Some of it was very clever and very bitter. Elton was ashamed of it and burnt it.

But he still keeps one document of which he is even more ashamed—a letter from Tommy's mother in India, wishing to thank him personally and most warmly for his great goodness and kindness to her dear little son during the Christmas holidays.

## X

### CHRISIMISSIMA

**C**HRISTINA ARGENT was, officially and otherwise, the leader of the school at Helmstone. Her age and position in the school gave her the official leadership and made her monitor. But official leaders often have but little influence and dominance: Christina had much. If she had been younger and lower on the list, it is probable she would still have led.

There must be a reason for this, and Olive Pastowe would have said that the reason was that Christina was by far the nicest girl in the school and also the prettiest. But as Olive and Christina were great friends, Olive's evidence is open to objection on the score of bias. In some respects the girls were alike; they were both fifteen, both dark-haired. If Christina, who could look very proud, was really the prettiest girl in the school, certainly Olive came second. They had the same tastes; their handwriting was ludicrous in its similarity. But Christina had authority and Olive had none. Minna Nathan would have explained this on the ground that Christina was the wealthiest girl in the school and the daughter of titled parents. But Minna, to be frank, was a mean-souled snob; and one regrets to add that Minna's papa was another. Ellen Holmes would have pointed out that Christina was the best hockey-player and could throw a cricket-

ball just like a boy. This is true as far as it goes. But Christina was no Admirable Crichton in work or in sport. Her arithmetic was marked "Deplorable" in her report. Her friend Olive could give her half fifteen at tennis, nor could she swim twice the length of the bath under water, a feat which Ellen Holmes herself could accomplish. We must perforce consider that Ellen was wanting in psychological analysis.

It is more satisfactory—and also quite easy—to say that Christina Argent was a leader because she possessed the gift of leadership. It is a mysterious gift. It is a gift which has been possessed by people who in other respects bore little resemblance to each other—by Chatham, for example, and by General Booth; by Gladstone and by Beaconsfield. In such men lies the note of dominant personality, and the greatest amount of the highest attainments can never make up for the want of it or take the place of it. Look, for example, at such illustrious failures as—— But you may fill in the names for yourself; you will have no difficulty.

The natural consequence of Christina's pre-eminence was that Olive's principal claim to consideration was that she was the one intimate friend of Christina. She had her own merits. If you had asked specially about her tennis, you would have been told that she was simply splendid, and had won a tournament in which several adults were engaged. In work she had shown an aptitude that was almost uncanny for English history. But if you had merely said: "Who's Olive?" the answer would have been—"Olive? Why, she's Christina's greatest friend." The principal claim to distinction would have been first stated. Mabel Leroy would have said that Olive was Christina's best pal, but Mabel was always a little slangy,



It was commonly pleaded in her defense that she had many brothers.

It would appear from the pages of history that the favorites of the great all fall from their high estate. The kindly historian assigns the fall to the capriciousness and fickleness of the monarch, but it must be confessed that the favorite has frequently brought it on himself. Because he has held his position for a long time he regards it as an assured position; he has presumed. When we come to consider the celebrated break between Olive and Christina, which created so much talk in the Helmstone school, we find that the first step came from Olive herself. As she admitted afterwards, she began it. She may have been right in what she did, or she may have been wrong; the bare facts shall be recorded.

The school possessed its own playing-fields, and the pupils spent most of their leisure there; but at certain times they were required to take a formal and processional walk through the streets of Helmstone—a thing abhorrent. It is true that the walk gave them a passing glimpse into fascinating shop-windows, and enabled them to make notes of the prevalent feminine fashions; but these delights were miserably tempered. It was only a passing glimpse, and while you looked at one side of the street you missed things on the other. That delicious and prolonged flattening of the nose against the plate-glass, while you are wondering which you would buy if you could afford it, was not the thing that Miss Ferdinand or any of her agents would have permitted. If a horse had fallen or a motor-car broken down, the school might not stand around with wondering eyes and dropped jaws, and ask the policeman how it happened; the procession could give but

one longing look and continue to proceed. Then, too, there was the consciousness that this procession of girls, each with the school colors on a severe straw hat, was greeted with humorous and impolite comment by the vulgar. Men said things and you could see the smile. For this reason Christina at the head of the procession always wore an expression of remote, refrigerated haughtiness; and even her friend Olive by her side did her best to appear less interested in things in general than she really was.

Subject to the approval of the authorities, the girls settled among themselves how they would be paired for the walk. Thus Elsa would say to Marjorie: "May I walk with you to-day?" And Marjorie would reply: "Yes, do let's," or "I've promised Dora," according to her inclinations or arrangements. But Christina and Olive always walked together as a matter of course, and had done so for a very long time—more than a fortnight, as Christina afterwards calculated. This makes the case look rather black against Olive; yet it is possible that in what she did she was actuated by kindness—degenerating into weakness, if you like, but still kindness. Hear and judge for yourself.

Olive came up to Christina in the cloak-room five minutes before the walk started, and said: "Chrisimissima"—this was her fond abbreviation of her leader's name—"I hope you don't mind, but I'm walking with Nellie Holmes to-day. She's asked me so often that I was simply ashamed to keep on saying that I was engaged."

Christina treated the matter with a suspicious lightness. "Of course you're not engaged," she said. "Hope you'll have a nice time. I'd promised to walk

with Gwen, anyhow." This last statement was quite untrue, and it is unfortunately not the only untruth with which we shall have to discredit Christina. She went off at once to make the arrangement with Gwen—a pusillanimous wretch who broke a distinct promise to Mabel Leroy in order that she might accept the flattering boon of Christina's society.

Olive did not enjoy the walk in the least. She was troubled and depressed. She asked herself if she had done right. She loved Christina, but she did not want to hurt anybody's feelings—not even those of Nellie Holmes. Still, if Christina was going to be offended, was Nellie Holmes worth it?

Nellie, as has already been pointed out, could swim twice the length of the bath under water. But she stopped there.

Yes, the above paragraph is unfortunately expressed. What is really meant, is that Ellen Holmes had no accomplishments other than natatory. Also, she was as plain as a motor-omnibus.

Christina was very angry. That "I hope you don't mind" of Olive's was tactless and rankled. Why on earth should she mind? Any girl in the school would be only too glad and proud to be her companion on the walk. All the same, she did hate people who did not know their own minds, or pretended to be very fond of you when they really did not care. And if that was the way Olive was going on, she would soon show her—— Elliptical but threatening.

She spoke of Olive to Gwen quite dispassionately, with scrupulous fairness, not shutting her eyes to the fact that Olive had her slightly ridiculous side. The slave Gwendolen endeavored to echo the note, and got badly snubbed for her pains. Gwendolen had not

realized that in her place by Christina's side she was merely a caretaker, and that caretakers should not behave like owners.

Christina and Olive met after the walk. "I'd much sooner have been with you," said Olive at once.

Christina wore that air of not having heard, which is not uncommon with those who have the gift of leadership. Olive had to repeat her remark, with some of the enthusiasm chilled out of her.

"Really!" said Christina, giving her attention to the arrangement of her hair. "I should have thought Minnie Nathan would just have suited you."

"It wasn't Minnie Nathan," said Olive indignantly, "and you know it wasn't. I simply can't stand her. It was only poor little Nellie, because nobody seems——"

Christina swept away from the looking-glass with a fair-to-middling assumption of boredom. "Oh, well," she said, "you can't expect me to know who all your friends are; besides, it doesn't interest me."

The rapidity with which news of importance is obtained and circulated in girls' schools is a problem that still baffles the inquirer. That very afternoon it was whispered in the classroom that the old, almost monumental, friendship between Christina and Olive was quite broken up. The report was brought for confirmation to Christina herself by Minna Nathan, who was generally active in any pretty work of the kind. "You can't break up what wasn't," said Christina with cold disdain.

Later in the day it was announced, officially, that Miss Ferdinand would give a special prize for history at the end of the term; and, unofficially, that Olive Pastowe meant to go in for it. "Funny," said Christina, when she heard. "I'm going in for it myself."

However," she added, with a humility which would have been more touching if it had been convincing, "she's bound to beat me."

It must be admitted that, as a rule, the disposition of extra prizes in this school was a matter of arrangement among the girls themselves. Naturally, the complete duffer was not allowed to annex them; that would have been unjust and would have awakened the suspicions of the authorities. But when four girls all had a chance of the same prize, they settled among themselves which of the four was to get it. The selection depended on various considerations. The girl who got the prize last time would, of course, be ruled out. The girl who was certain of other prizes would also be told not to be greedy. On the other hand, a girl who was in for a bad-conduct report would have some claim on that prize as a counter-weight. The girl who first demanded it—"Bags I the history prize" would be the correct formula—and had been promised a sovereign by papa if she brought a prize home, would have a very strong case, more especially if she agreed to divide a moiety of that sovereign among the other competitors.

The system had its advantages. It prevented rivalry and bitterness of feeling. Under a strictly competitive system four girls would have worked cruelly hard, and three would have been disappointed; by this method one girl worked moderately, three were as slack as they pleased, and there were no disappointments at all. The captious moralist may say that it suggests that the auction knock-out is a feminine invention, but we have no concern with him.

It will be seen, then, that Christina had disregarded the etiquette of the school. Olive, by using the "Bags

I" formula, had put in a claim for the history prize. That claim would have been subjected to discussion, and might, or might not, have been established. But it was contrary to all settled principles for another girl to introduce a crude rivalry into the business, and, without any discussion of Olive's claim, to oppose it by sheer work. It meant bad feeling. It meant a lowering of the standard to that of mere competition. It meant that the girl who knew the most history would get the history prize. It was subversive. It was all wrong.

Yet there was no general condemnation of Christina's action; such was the strength of her position. It was regarded with sorrow rather than with anger. With gentle resignation all other possible competitors for that extra prize withdrew. In this life-or-death struggle between Olive and Christina there was no place for the ordinary weakling. Six to four in small square caramels was offered on Christina and taken.

It was terrific. The ease and exactitude with which both Christina and Olive answered all questions in each day's history lesson astounded, even while it pleased, Miss Ferdinand. Guilelessly she held up these two girls as examples to the class. Little did she know that Olive had borrowed money (which was against the rules) to buy candles (which were not allowed) for the purpose of nocturnal work in her bedroom—a thing absolutely illegal. Little did she know the still more horrid fact that the pages of Christina's Prayer Book were literally pencilled with mundane and ungodly dates, and that Christina committed them to memory when she should indubitably have been thinking of other things.

"I wouldn't work like those two for a good deal,"

said Flossie Bayle, and she spoke the truth and voiced the general sentiment. Any reasonable girl would have been reluctant to work like that, but people do silly things when their blood is up.

The break between the two friends increased and became more definite with their rivalry. They spoke to one another as little as possible now, and always with icy civility. Olive looked sometimes at Christina with wistful eyes, but Christina was careful never to look at Olive at all, and when Christina changed her place in the dining-hall so as not to sit next to Olive, Olive bit her lip and took the only course possible to a girl of spirit; she complained of a draught, and thus got herself removed from the seat beside Christina in the classroom.

On the day before the examination Christina had gone back to even betting. Minna Nathan, who had accepted six to four from the friends of Christina, now backed Christina herself for five caramels, and openly proclaimed that she was on velvet either way. It is needless to add that Minna took the arithmetic prize.

Breakfast-time came on the great day of the history examination, and no books might be read at breakfast. Christina, however, circumvented the regulation. She received a letter from home addressed in the handwriting of her eldest sister. The letter itself dealt with the Rockingham Administration, the career of Wilkes, the character of Thurlow, and other pleasant trifles of the period. In this way Christina was enabled to gorge knowledge up to the very last moment.

Olive also had a letter from home, but her letter was quite genuine, and Olive turned as white as the cloth when she read it.

The examination began at nine; when a girl had

finished her paper she handed it up to Miss Packman and was then free to go and play. Mabel Leroy looked through the questions, said "By gum!" under her breath, wrote two lines of fantastic imbecility about the surrender of Lord Cornwallis, and showed up her paper at 9.7 precisely. But this was not tolerated. She was commanded to think and to try again. At 9.30 she was allowed to go. Nellie Holmes had written all she knew, and some things that she did not know, a few minutes later. It was a stiff paper, and few there were that could wrestle long with it. When Minna Nathan showed up her paper at 11.15, after surreptitiously tossing a coin to settle the date of Chatham's death, she left only Christina and Olive still writing. The paper suited Christina perfectly. It would have suited Olive equally well, but Olive had received bad news that morning, and could not keep her mind on her work. Seated with her face to the wall, she had wept quietly and unobserved. But she was still struggling on when twelve struck; and the two girls met at the desk to give in their papers. Christina noticed Olive's face, seemed on the verge of speaking, and then turned away.

Christina knew that she had done well. She had answered every question. She had been a little in doubt as to the date of Austerlitz, and had made a shot. The shot, she found on referring to her history, had been singularly blessed. But, even as she turned the pages of the history, she was haunted by that look of Olive's. What could have happened to her? Christina felt that she must find out, and for that purpose she sought Minna Nathan. Minna was not popular, and knew far too much arithmetic; but Minna had



also a gift for knowing the private affairs of other girls.

"Come here, Minna," said Christina, with dignity. "Now, then, what has Olive been crying about?"

"Don't you know? Her mother's ill, and there's to be an operation to-morrow morning. I believe she'll die; they generally do when there's an operation. I'll have a bet with you on it, if you like."

"No. Go on."

"That's all. Oh, yes, she's to get a telegram to-morrow morning. She didn't seem to want to talk about it much, and she's gone off to the end of the garden by herself. It's ruined her chance of the history prize—she says that half the time she didn't know what she was writing about."

"I see," said Christina.

Christina had set her heart on that history prize. There could be no doubt that she would get it, and quite suddenly she found that she did not want it at all; the only thing she did want was that Olive should have it. She made her plan on the instant.

"Is there anything else you want to know?" asked the obsequious Minna. "I can find out some more if you like. Mother calls me her little detective."

"Does she? Sweet child! No, I don't want any more. By the way, you're all wrong about the history prize. The paper didn't suit me a bit. I made a lot of howlers, and some of the questions I never even tried."

Minna went off, eager to disseminate the news of Christina's failure. Christina could generally calculate on what Minna would do.

Olive sat alone on a bench at the further end of the garden. It was very cold, but she did not notice it; the

evergreens shut out from her view the terrible world. In one red hand she held a wet handkerchief, and in the other the letter from her father.

After all, it contained crumbs of comfort. "I hope to send you a reassuring telegram to-morrow morning," it said. "Don't be frightened." She read the sentences over and over again. Oh, if she only had somebody to whom she could really talk about it! In the old days——

She looked up at the sound of a footstep, and there was Christina—Christina, with both hands stretched out—Chrisimissima, with no dignity at all, and visible tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Olive dear! don't tell me to go away, or be polite or anything. I've only just heard, and I'm most awfully sorry for you. And I wish I hadn't behaved like a pig and a beast to you. O-oh, o-oh, o-oh!" Christina was sobbing.

"Oh, Chrisimissima!" They became inarticulate, with their arms round one another.

A little later they read the letter together. And it appeared that Christina's mother had undergone an operation, and had got well again ever so soon; and that, on the whole, operations were rather a good thing, because doctors were most frightfully clever nowadays.

Olive was much comforted, and the delicate question of the history prize was touched upon. "Of course I've lost it," said Olive. "Really, I hardly knew what I was writing, and I couldn't think. But I'm glad you'll have it. The only thing is that my people will be disappointed—mummy particularly; and I hope it won't be bad for her. You see, history's about the only thing I was ever any good at."

"That's all right," said Christina. "It's absolutely certain you've got the prize. I can promise you that. The paper didn't suit me in the least, and none of the things that I had worked up were asked. I was perfectly putrid. I didn't even try half the questions."

"I did more than that," said Olive doubtfully. "But, still——"

They compared notes. Christina repeated her assurance. Olive would get the prize, and Chrisimissima would be delighted.

It happened even as Christina had said. The history prize was awarded to Olive, who wondered how it had come to pass, but telegraphed the glad news home to a convalescent mother. Christina was told that her answers had been scanty and inaccurate. "You have disappointed me," said Miss Ferdinand. Christina smiled sweetly.

Now, Christina had done well in the examination, Olive had done badly, Miss Ferdinand marked the papers fairly, and yet Olive got the prize. The explanation is simple enough.

The position of monitor carried with it the very high privilege of acting as occasional errand-girl to Miss Ferdinand. It was always Christina who was deputed to bring the pile of examination papers from the class-room to Miss Ferdinand's study.

"Here is the key to the desk in which the papers are," said Miss Ferdinand solemnly. "And remember, Christina, that I am trusting to your honor."

Christina had only to transpose her own papers and Olive's, changing the outer sheets which alone bore the competitor's name. The close similarity of their handwritings prevented any detection of the fraud. Often in the old days had Olive written half of Chris-

tina's imposition for her, or Christina rendered a similar service to Olive.

Chrisimissima had been insanely jealous. She had told fibs. She had, in the matter of the examination papers, been guilty of a dishonorable breach of trust. Can anything be said for her?

## XI

### A VICIOUS CIRCLE

ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE INSTINCT OF THE CAT AND  
OF THE DOG

#### I

LADY VERMOISE did not ask Mrs. Palton for the 14th, when many desirable people would have been met. Now, Lady Vermoise had professed affection for Angela Palton, and was distantly related to her.

It may have been carelessness on the part of Lady Vermoise. It may have been a reflection that Mrs. Palton was “not *quite*—well, just a little *rather*, eh? You know what I mean.” And it may have been a touch of conscience that made Lady Vermoise ask Mrs. Palton for the 19th, when, however, on her own showing there would be nobody but George (George is a perfect idiot).

Mrs. Palton’s refusal for the 19th was perfectly charming and polite. “I don’t dream of letting her think that I’ve taken offense,” she said to her husband. “All the same——”

#### II

MRS. PALTON’S cook, Emma Blades, was a woman of character, three years in her last place, an early riser,

fond of children, and had other qualities which deserve and should receive our admiration and respect.

Mrs. Palton gave one of her dinner-parties—biennial, allowing time for recovery before the next. Emma Blades did her very best. She did not spare herself. Everything was beautiful.

Mrs. Palton may have been tired next morning—could you wonder? It may have simply never occurred to her. Certainly she omitted any word of compliment to Emma Blades next morning, and Emma noticed it.

Mrs. Palton showed more thoughtfulness later in the day, when she reflected that there would only be the cutlets to warm up, to be followed by the remainder *macédoine*, and told Emma that she could go out that evening.

“Thank you very muchum,” said Emma Blades. “I’d prefer not to.” It was said with a refrigerated respectfulness.

“Ho, yes,” said Emma Blades to the house-parlorer after, “I wasn’t going to show I’d troubled my ’ead about it. But, however, when it comes to favors——”

### III

EMMA BLADES was not only aunt, but also godmother to her married sister’s youngest, Doris, aged ten, who needs to control her temper—her mother has admitted it. And Emma Blades practically never forgot that Doris had a birthday on May 3, and signified the same in the usual manner.

But, of course, a biennial dinner-party may put everything out of anybody’s head. Besides, Emma

had a bad memory for dates. It was June 7 before she discovered that she had forgotten our Doris's birthday. She hastened at once to an act of reparation.

She sent Doris macaroons—and it is none of your business where Emma Blades got them from. They were packed in the card box which had contained the house-parlorer's collars, and enclosed with them was an old birthday-card which Emma had bread-crumbed from a love of cleanliness, and very nearly fried from the force of natural sequence.

And Doris wrote on a post card: "Dear Arnty, Meny thanks for your kind biskwits."

"For she shan't think I care," said Doris. Notwithstanding, not one of those biscuits would she eat. She gave them to a strange dog in the park.

## IV

Now, that dog was the property of Lady Vermoise. It had been sent out for exercise with the second footman. But the second footman was heavy with Benedictine; for, as he had observed to the first footman, if he did not take it, somebody else would, so he had slept in Battersea Park and left the physical development to the dog.

It was a small black dog, reputed to be of Japanese extraction. It was all fluff and bark. Lady Vermoise called the black dog "Snowball." In fact, all her ladyship's friends admitted that she was full of humor; and, after all, it is what our friends say about us which really matters.

At tea-time the second footman, by command,

brought in Snowball. No dog is really the better for four large macaroons, and in any case there was something Japanese and bizarre about Snowball's disposition. He lay under a chair and snarled.

"Know what that means?" Lady Vermoise asked her guests brightly. "Snowball and I are not *quite*—just a teeny-weeny—well, he had to have a little lesson from me. Dogs that snatch at things which are offered them have them taken away again, don't they, Snowball? It happened at breakfast-time. You should witness an interesting *rapprochement*. Here, Snowball, is the shortbread to which you are addicted. Gently now. *De la douceur, Boule-de-neige, calme-toi tes transports!*"

Upon which Snowball, with rapidity and decision, bit Lady Vermoise in the fleshy part of her hand.



## XII

### SUNNIBROW

OR, WHAT THE PRACTICAL BUILDER SAID TO THE YOUNG  
MAN

**W**ISH you was me, young man, do you? You young chaps who make a mess at one trade always think you could have succeeded at any other. If you think that building houses, and letting them, and keeping them let, is as easy as falling downstairs, you're mistaken. It needs knowledge, and it needs hard work. I've worked hard, and I've got the knowledge. There's nobody can tell me anything about mortar I don't know. Didn't know I ever used any? Thank you; I don't want any jokes of that kind. I'm a respectable tradesman, with a reputation which I study.

Yes; and when you've done the work and got the knowledge, you may make losses through not having forecast the unforeseeable. That's what happened to me with that blackguard Pirbright and my row of little houses at Dyrtisea. I'll just tell you about that, and then you'll see it ain't all velvet in my trade.

Dyrtisea will be a fine place one of these days. It only wants a little enterprise on the part of the local inhabitants. You can't make a first-class seaside resort out of nothing. I got my bit of ground there on favorable terms. There was a big land sale, and free

lunch in the marquee on the estate, as per advertisement. I sat and ate my lunch, and then I sat and looked on at the auction, and said nothing. There is mostly a mug at these sales, and I was watching for one. I found him. He was a mug that had bitten off more than he could chew. Just after lunch some people feel richer than they are.

So I had a little chat with him afterwards, and made myself as pleasant as I could. I told him he'd given too much for his land, and that he'd never see his money back, nor half of it. Land at Dyrtisea was no more use than a sick-headache to most people. However, when a gentleman was buying for himself, that was different from a commercial speculation.

He said he was afraid he'd bought more than he intended, and he had meant to put up houses there. He had bought speculatively, in fact. So I gave him my card, with a few appropriate remarks. There were other builders there, chaps that were just simply on the make, and I gave him a friendly warning of what he might expect if he fell into their hands.

"And," I said, "as a proof that I'm straight with you, I advise you to take what you can get for your land, and cut the loss, even though it loses me the job of building for you. I could see they were running you up at the auction, and I only wish I could have got near enough to you to have given you a hint then."

He thanked me. Two months later I'd bought most of his land, at what I should call a reasonable reduction; and that wasn't all. I got the job of putting up a house for him on the bit he kept; and even after I'd compromised the auction it left a profit, so that was all right.

Then I ran up my row of six houses, and called

them Carlton Terrace. Did you ever hear a song "Once, in the dear, dead days beyond recall"? Carlton Terrace at Dyrtisea always reminds me of that.

Yes; my boy, those were the times. Nowadays over-inspection is simply cutting into the heart of the trade. But at Dyrtisea then there was absolutely nothing that a practical builder couldn't get round somehow, and I did get round. I wasn't forced to throw a lot of money away over silly regulations. My idea was to let those houses for three years, and then paint them up a bit and fill in where necessary, and sell the lot. After three years, knowing the houses, I knew they'd be about ripe for getting rid of.

I wrote my own advertisement, and I didn't leave anything out. It said: "Builder's sacrifice.—On the outskirts of the lovely old-world village of Dyrtisea, and commanding magnificent views of the English Channel. Compact seven-roomed residence, tiled forecourt, electric bells, and every modern luxury. Only needs to be seen." And so forth and so on.

I let my first tenant in pretty easy to give the thing a start; and, seeing the bargain he got, I wasn't best pleased when he died of double pneumonia, and his widow came complaining to me.

"What do you mean?" I said. "I let your husband a house, and let him have it cheap. I never told him to move in before the plaster was dry. You be thankful I'm not bringing an action for moral deterioration of my property."

So that settled her.

Then another tenant got typhoid, and complained about the plumber's work. Things had been a little cut down on that side. But, as I said to him, you chaps nowadays expect a marble bath and silver

fittings in a twenty-eight-pound house, and it can't be done. Well, I sent a man to do a little to some of the leaky joints, and that kept him quiet.

However, by giving the thing my personal attention, I soon got five out of my six houses let to good tenants on yearly agreements; and the agreements were drawn to my own model, and had got more catches in them than any fly-paper. There was only Sunnibrow left, and one unlucky day I let that to this man Pirbright. He said he was a traveller for a firm of cycle manufacturers, and he paid a quarter in advance. He was a hard-faced man, and I was a little surprised that he took my special kind of yearly agreement as easily as he did.

And he'd hardly moved his sticks in before the row began. I got St. Mildred's and The Chase both coming in and complaining about the man at Sunnibrow. St. Mildred's and The Chase were the two houses adjoining Sunnibrow, and they were let to my prize tenants. They made their garden look nice, and they had window-boxes, and planted creepers. (Didn't know I cared so much about flowers, didn't you? Why, I could let a dog-kennel with the roof off and the bottom out if it only had a Virginian creeper growing up the front.)

They never gave any trouble; and when the walls cracked they just filled up the cracks and re-papered at their own expense. And The Chase had put up a little greenhouse, that he wouldn't be able to take away with him when he went. They complained that on Tuesday night there had been a most awful noise at Sunnibrow—violent banging against the walls, loud screaming, and what The Chase called "demoniac laughter." It was so bad that St. Mildred's went

round to Sunnibrow to see what was the matter; but though he knocked and rang several times, he could get no answer, and the whole house seemed to be in darkness. Yet the noises went on worse than ever.

"We put up with the cracks in the walls," said The Chase, "you having told us that every new house was bound to settle if properly built; but this is a case where we must really ask you to do something."

"So I will," I said. "I'll do pretty well anything in reason for good tenants, like you and St. Mildred's. I'll go round to Sunnibrow this morning—ill though I can spare the time—and just remind him of the terms of his agreement. If he causes you the slightest trouble or inconvenience, then out he goes."

And I meant it, too. Under-pinning costs a deal, but it wouldn't cost me anything to frighten Pirbright. Both St. Mildred's and The Chase paid punctually, and were a much softer thing than one generally comes across in business. Then, again, I didn't like that talk of "violent banging against the walls." You see, I knew those walls. They were all right for the ordinary wear and tear of a Christian home, but they'd never been constructed to stand horseplay. I slipped on my coat and hat, and went round to Sunnibrow at once. Pirbright answered the door himself.

"Come in," he said. "This is lucky. I was just going to see you about that waste-pipe from the sink. What's wrong is——"

"Yes," I said; "but I've got to talk about something much worse than that. I mean, what was going on in this house on the night of Tuesday last? I've had complaints about the noise from St. Mildred's and also from The Chase."

"Tuesday night?" he said. "Why, I wasn't here then. I'm often away on my business."

"So you say," I said. "Very naturally. But——"

"Well," he said savagely, "look at this letter, and the postmarks on the envelope."

I looked at it very carefully. It was a letter to him from his firm, dated on the Monday. It was addressed to an hotel in Liverpool, and the envelope bore Tuesday's postmark, and had not been re-addressed. And the letter referred to business in Liverpool which was to occupy him on the Wednesday; and I remembered that St. Mildred's had been unable to get any answer to a ring, and had seen no light in the house.

Still, I knew for a certainty that St. Mildred's and The Chase would not have complained without a reason; and his explanation might be satisfactory, so far as he personally was concerned, but, even if he had not made the row himself, he was the tenant, and responsible for the people who had made it.

And so I told him.

"I don't care," I said, "whether it was you that made the row, or whether it was your servant or your friends, or your servant's friends. If I get any more of it, I'll turn you out; and if you think I can't do that, just glance over the clause at the bottom of page three of your agreement."

"I don't keep a servant," said Pirbright. "I manage for myself. And I've never had any friends here. I was just getting the home ready to bring my wife to—I'm to be married in a month's time. Looks to me like a bit of a mystery."

"Well, I don't care what it looks like to you. You're responsible; and if it happens again, you know now what to expect. That's all I've got to say about it."

"Ah," said Pirbright, "then we can go on to the subject of that pipe. The waste-pipe, as fixed at present, discharges direct into——"

"I've no time to talk about that now. Before you ask a landlord to provide you, at his own expense, with extra luxuries and improvements, you'd better show yourself a more desirable tenant. Good morning!"

And I thought that was the end of it.

Next day I saw Pirbright helping St. Mildred's to nail up a creeper, and chatting away as friendly as possible; and, later in the week, I found he was having tea at The Chase, and St. Mildred's and his wife were there, too. So it looked as if everything was forgiven and forgotten, and all was peace and happiness again.

Next Sunday I met St. Mildred's and The Chase out for a walk together, and they came up to say that they had been mistaken, and that Pirbright was not responsible for the row on Tuesday night.

"As a matter of fact," said St. Mildred's, "we've got to know him, and a very pleasant fellow he seems. We are satisfied that neither he nor anybody else was in Sunnibrow that night."

"Well, well," I said, "we needn't go into that. So long as the row doesn't happen again, we can let bygones be bygones."

"But the row does go on," said The Chase. "It's worse than ever. The banging at the walls is louder, and there is more of the screaming and demoniac laughter. But it never happens when Pirbright's in the house—never once. In fact, we've begun to look on him as a kind of safeguard. We should feel very uneasy if he went altogether."

"It looks to me," said St. Mildred's, "like a case for the Psychological Society."

"I suppose," said the Chase, "you didn't find anything curious when you were digging out the foundations or levelling the garden?"

"I found a patch of sand, which I hadn't expected; and if I'd found it a bit earlier it would have saved me money over building the other houses."

"Yes," said The Chase; "what I meant was—did you find human remains, or anything of that kind?"

"No," I said, "I did not. And I hope both you gentlemen will put any idea of that kind out of your heads. That sort of thing doesn't do house property any good, and there can't be any foundation for it. A house that was built the day before yesterday, like Sunnibrow, can't be a haunted house. It's against the rules. Ask any man who's studied these things, and he'll tell you that."

"Still," said St. Mildred's, "there are the facts. We've investigated those noises, and we can't find anything to explain them. Then there's the figure of a woman in white. That's been seen twice in the terrace late at night—once by Mr. Proudfoot of Stanley Court, and once by Mrs. Johnson of Herne Nest. Then there's the loud cracking noise at The Pleasaunce: Mr. Smith has always put it down to the house settling so far, but now he says he's not so sure about it."

Now, that made me pretty angry. Here was every blessed tenant bitten with this ghostly nonsense, and I knew it was that blackguard Pirbright who'd done it. A pretty business it would be for me if they all cleared out. With the talk it would make in the neighborhood, it would be a long time before I could let a house in Carlton Terrace again.

"Look here, gentlemen," I said: "this is simply



and solely a trick of that Pirbright's. Now, I'm going to do just two things: first, I'm going to find out how he worked the trick, and then I'm going to give him the sack; and if there's any ghostly manifestation after he's gone, I'll eat my hat."

They told me I was mistaken in my estimate of Pirbright.

"We'll see," I said.

So next morning I hung about the terrace until I saw Pirbright leave his house. I had my own private key to the front door of Sunnibrow; and as soon as Pirbright was out of sight, I let myself in. I examined the whole house from top to bottom, and only one little thing did I find that looked at all suspicious. And when I got outside the house again, there was Pirbright standing in the garden.

"Hallo!" he said. "What are you doing there?"

"Landlord has reasonable access," I said.

"That be damned! Letting yourself in by your own key without notice ain't reasonable access. It's more like burglary."

"You'll find what I mean by reasonable access in clause forty-three of your agreement. I thought, Mr. Pirbright, you told me you were living alone."

"So I am."

"Well, I found this hairpin in the passage."

"Very likely. I'd the whole family in from next door yesterday afternoon, investigating these rum-funny noises."

"Yes," I said; "and I told you that if that disturbance was repeated, you'd go. It has been repeated. To-day's Monday. You can clear yourself and your furniture out of this by next Saturday morning at the latest."

"Thank you," he said. "I should like to have that in writing, if you wouldn't mind stepping inside once more."

So I gave him it in writing, and he took it quite cheerfully.

"Right," he said. "I shall be out by Saturday. And you'll hear from my solicitors in the course of the week."

Next day I got notice from St. Mildred's and The Chase. And the day following I got similar notice from Herne Nest, Stanley Court, and The Pleasaunce.

And that's the kind of thing that a man in my business may be called upon to face!

Well, I know when I'm beaten. I went round to Sunnibrow in the afternoon, and this time I rang the bell.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Pirbright," I said. "I called to tell you not to take any notice of what I said and wrote on Monday. Perhaps we both lost our tempers a little. We'll just tear that paper up."

"Well," said Pirbright, "I don't know that I care about stopping. It'll be lonely with every other house in the row empty."

"I fancy," I said, "that if you and I had a friendly chat, none of these houses would be empty, and you'd all be spared the trouble and expense of moving."

"It's possible," he said. "Come in."

"Now, then," I said, "if I could prove all I know, I fancy the Court would award me heavy damages."

"Very likely. Being awarded heavy damages is one thing; getting pudding out of empty saucepans is another."

"That thought had occurred to me. Well, it has also occurred to me that a man who starts a thing can

sometimes stop it—whether it's a ghost-story or anything else."

"That is so, if it's worth the man's while."

And so we came to terms. But that man Pirbright was absolutely unconscionable. He got a twenty-eight-pound house for twenty pounds, and an agreement that was against the landlord's interests, and a whole lot of plumbing work done for nothing. But it was better than having six houses standing empty; and my tenants didn't leave after all.

Must have had a confederate? Well, I knew that, of course. As soon as it was all settled, he said:

"And my missus will move in to-morrow. She's been living in lodgings in Dyrtisea till I got the place straight for her. She's been up here sometimes at nights; and it's just occurred to me that she's about the figure of that mysterious woman in white that they've been talking about. She's as handy with a hammer as any man—opening crates and putting up pictures. I couldn't stand the noise, so she only did it when I was out—she'd always got her gramophone to keep her company."

"Yes," I said; "I see that. But you told me you were a bachelor, going to be married in a month's time."

"Did I?" he said. "Well, I never mind owning when I'm wrong. I must have been thinking of some other man."

## XIII

### AUNT MARTHA

GEORGE, who knew his duty and did it, was particularly careful to ask Aunt Martha if she was not coming too. She said she was not. She said that George's ideas of amusement were not hers. She referred to her time of life. George's wife, Jane, then tackled Aunt Martha herself, and said that it was the fresh air she ought to think about. Aunt Martha said that, not being in the habit of sucking sweets all day herself, she was not in want of any change of air or doctor's prescriptions. George went a step further. He took his daughter Gladys aside and told her that she really ought to ask Aunt Martha to come up to the Heath with them.

"What?" said Gladys, a child of sound sense. "Me ask her? Come off it!"

This ended the matter as far as Gladys was concerned. Privately George and Jane congratulated themselves. "She is a good woman," said George, "but she's not one to enjoy herself."

"No," said Jane, "nor let others, neither."

Therefore it was a bit of a shock when Aunt Martha appeared on the Monday morning with her loins girt, so to speak, and ready for the expedition.

"I have given in to you this once," she said, "and hope I shan't be sorry for it. It looks to me like rain.

Anyhow, I shall be there to stop any waste of money and lolloping about in public-houses."

Aunt Martha preferred the inside of the tram. The rest of the party preferred the outside.

"Then you go in, aunt, and we'll go out," said Jane.

"Then how am I to know where I am to get out? I wonder you can be so selfish."

George, a noble-hearted fellow, went inside with Aunt Martha. He had a very fair twopenny smoke in one pocket, and his pipe and pouch in another. He was also well provided with matches. As the tram rumbled along he had leisure to think about these things.

"You needn't have told me," said Aunt Martha at the journey's end, "that the trams went right up to the Heath, because they don't."

"Well, it's only a step," said George apologetically.

"It's long enough for Gladys to get lost, such a crowd as there is. You give me your hand, Gladys. Now, then, George, don't stop about trying to light that cigar of yours."

Gladys suggested the purchase of a tin rattle, of a blue turquoise bracelet—more or less turquoise, that is—of some peacocks' feathers, of a bag of lavender, and of a paper hat made on a concertina principle. These propositions were successively negatived by Aunt Martha, who observed that little girls were made to be seen and not heard, and if she asked for anything else, she would be sent home immediately. By a clever piece of strategy Gladys managed to transfer herself from her aunt to her father. She tied the coppers up in a corner of her handkerchief and quite understood that she need not say anything to Aunt Martha about

them. The question of when and where they should feed arose for discussion.

"It's all one to me," said Aunt Martha. "Settle it for yourselves. Apparently anything I like is what everybody else dislikes. It was so in the tram coming here, and it'll go on being so till the end of the day. The very moment we got out, George started on his cigar, which was just the same as if he'd told me to my face that I'd been keeping him from it. Perhaps it would be a better thing for his health if I could keep him from it."

The family decided that half-past one would be an excellent hour for lunch, and that a shady spot should be found in some remote part of the Heath.

"Well," said Aunt Martha, "I had little or no breakfast, and I feel faint now. What I shall be like at half-past one I can't say. I shan't be able to eat anything, because I shall have gone past it. I thought we'd come here to see things, too, so what's the sense of sitting down where you can't see anything? As for the shade, where there's shade there's damp. That's a well-known fact. Perhaps you'd better just give me a sandwich and let me go off by myself. I dare say you'll all be glad to get rid of me."

George and Jane told the requisite lie. Gladys maintained a contemptuous silence. So they sat down in the sun in a spot from which a fine view of the cocoanut-shies and swings was to be obtained. They ate sandwiches and cake, and Gladys and Aunt Martha drank milk. George and Jane were not thirsty. At any rate, they were not thirsty until a little later, when they arrived at Jack Straw's Castle. George said it was a historic old place, and Jane ought to see it.

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Perhaps Aunt Martha would catch hold of Gladys for a moment.

George and Jane went to see the historic old place, and came out wiping their mouths. George looked as if he felt better.

“Booze, booze, booze, from morning till night,” said Aunt Martha. “I knew how it would be when we started.”

Jane observed that she thought a man wanted his pint in the middle of the day, and that he ought to have it.

Aunt Martha said that if she was to be contradicted every time she opened her mouth, perhaps it would be just as well if she said nothing at all for the rest of the afternoon. In fact, she would start off home at once if only she knew the way.

Then they went round the different shows—boxing-shows and cinematograph-shows, peep-shows, and waxworks. Aunt Martha gave moral and conclusive reasons why she would not go into any one of them. George shied at the cocoanuts, and Aunt Martha said she should be sorry to see any man make such an exhibition of himself in a public place. George tried one of the cocoanuts that he had won as a peace-offering. Aunt Martha rejected it. She added more information about her digestion and her internal organs than any woman ought to give any man except her doctor. A great friend of Aunt Martha’s had died from eating cocoanut, as George might have remembered.

So George gave the cocoanut to Gladys. She made the man with the Try-your-Strength machine break it open for her. By this time she possessed a tin rattle, a bracelet of a turquoise appearance, and a paper hat.

Aunt Martha noticed these things. If George and Jane thought it a good thing to bring up children to disobey their elders and betters, she supposed she couldn't help it. It looked as if she had only been brought out to be insulted. A cup of tea was what she wanted, and had been wanting for the last hour; but she supposed that that didn't matter.

She was given tea, and shortly afterwards the party left for home.

"And I suppose you call that a day's enjoyment," said Aunt Martha bitterly.

. . . . .

On the following Bank Holiday, George and Jane found that they had promised to take Gladys to the Zoo. This was most unfortunate, because the very sight of a wild beast caused Aunt Martha to come over faint and gave her internal cramp. So she could not accompany them. Perhaps they took the wrong tram. They turned up to Hampstead Heath, anyhow.



## XIV

### A DEVIL, A BOY, AND A TRADE DESIGNER

MR. PAXTON BLAND'S clerks were in the habit of saying that he was a devil. They respected him, but thought that he had too much energy. Business men who had dealings with him got to realize the extreme folly of monkeying with Paxton Bland, and sometimes alluded to the fact with bitterness. When he thought a man was trying to get ahead of him, Paxton Bland never protested or showed indignation; he knew that this world is far from perfect. He never threatened. He was one of those dogs that do not bark, but the man who attempted sharp practice with Paxton Bland generally came to the conclusion that he bit considerably.

His wife thought him the sweetest-tempered man in the world. She found him so gentle and easy to manage, that she wondered at first that in the rough competition of business he did not get thrown down and stepped on. Yet, as far as she could judge by results—and her husband did not show her processes—he was not subjected to this humiliating catastrophe. The results took the form of money—heaps of money, every year more money—money enough to buy Sandiloes as soon as he found she wanted it. She conjectured that possibly his way with men was different from his way with women. That, in fact, was the case.

Sandiloes consisted of a house, out-buildings, and twelve acres of land, eight miles from a railway station in Oxfordshire. The house was old, picturesque, and had a semi-ecclesiastical appearance; it photographed very nicely, and the photographs were admirably reproduced in the catalogue of the London house-agents. It was in their catalogue that Mrs. Bland first saw and fell in love with the place. Then she went down and inspected it personally, and fell in love with it still more. Then she talked to Paxton about it, and Paxton talked to an architect, and following his creed that you should give a woman what she wants when you can, he bought Sandiloes.

Mrs. Paxton Bland was not the only person who had been struck by the photographs in the catalogue. A white-haired old gentleman in Hornsey was much interested in them. He lived in a small detached house, and a brass plate on the door said that he was Mr. Albert Watt, trade designer, but did not tell you what a trade designer was. It apparently involved a profound study of house property. Mr. Watt read many catalogues, giving the preference to those that had illustrations and plans. Against certain items he put a little mark. Occasionally he travelled about the country and asked questions relating to house property; but he never made any attempt to purchase any. He seemed quite content with the little house in Hornsey. There an old housekeeper, who did not look very pleasant, attended to his wants; his few visitors did not look very pleasant either; they seemed to be of a lower class than Mr. Watt. He was neatly and quietly dressed, as befits an old gentleman, paid his bills with the utmost regularity, and was ready with a modest subscription to any good and local cause.

The more he thought about Sandiloes the more he wanted to see it. It was sold, as he was aware, to Mr. Paxton Bland, but that did not matter. One morning he set out with a black bag and left the trade designing to take care of itself for one day.

But I fear that he was inaccurate when, on calling at Sandiloes that afternoon, before Mr. Paxton Bland returned from the City, he gave a card which stated that his name was Champneys, and that he represented the great publishing house of Orwell and Smith.

That night Mrs. Bland asked her husband at dinner if he wanted to be in "Our English Homes," published by Messrs. Orwell and Smith. He answered that it had been the dream of his life, but that so far he had hidden it from her; he did not speak with any excessive seriousness.

"Well," she said, smiling—and she had a very pretty smile—"it's going to be. Their man, or traveller, or whatever it's called, came here to-day to get permission to send an artist down to make sketches of the place. Richards showed him round, so that he could choose the best points for the pictures."

"Did he collect a subscription for a copy of the book when it is finished?"

"No, but I sent a message to him through Richards, and he said that particulars would be sent us."

"And did he borrow money or merely take an umbrella out of the hall?"

"Nothing of the kind! Oh, you're quite wrong there—you are, indeed, Paxton! I saw him through the window, and he looked a most respectable old gentleman, with a most respectable black bag."

"I've a mean mind; but I'm glad it's all right."

In reality, he was far from thinking it all right.

He would have been much better satisfied if the old gentleman had collected a subscription or purloined an overcoat. That would have been a sufficient explanation of his exceedingly improbable story. Messrs. Orwell and Smith were not in the habit of publishing that class of book at all. If they had been publishing it they would have written for permission—there was no need to send a man down. Their man, if he had been sent, would have had a prospectus of the book that he could have shown. Also, their traveller would not select the subjects for the artist. Finally, Mr. Bland did not believe that Sandiloes was of sufficient importance to be included in any such collection. One does not tell an elaborate story having no foundation in fact without some purpose. If the old gentleman had merely borrowed half a crown, there would have been the purpose; as it was, Mr. Bland feared the purpose was more serious, perhaps.

On the following night, Mr. Watt had a visitor at his little house in Hornsey. The visitor was not a young man of attractive appearance. He looked both flashy and furtive; his hair was very short and had been still shorter; his clothes were somewhat aggressive. He smoked a cigarette in a meerschaum holder and wore an elaborate buttonhole. His painfully dirty shirt was decorated by a stud with a colored stone in it. When he reached Mr. Watt's house he rapped very gently. His assurance returned when the old housekeeper opened the door to him. She seemed to know him, and asked him what he was doing out so late at night without his mother. To this the young man replied that he thought he was old enough to blow his nose for himself, that she grew younger every day, and that if he hadn't come on business he would have

taken her to the Savoy Hotel and stood her a pennyworth of whelks. With such graceful and refined badinage did the visitors to Mr. Watt replace the tiresome formality of more ordinary establishments. The housekeeper jerked her thumb towards a door, and said, "He's in there." Then she retired, and the visitor, after tapping at the door—Mr. Watt was particular about this—entered.

Mr. Watt had requested this visitor to call, and yet he did not look pleased or obliged when he saw him.

"Now, what am I to say to you?" Mr. Watt asked reflectively.

"Well, grandfawther," said the young man, "you ought to know. You sent for me. I was 'oping that you'd come on something that"—he hunted his mind for an euphemism—"had taken your fancy."

"I make mistakes," said Mr. Watt sadly. "I put lovely business in the way of people, and then I'm not remembered as I should be. Do you suppose Cockeye's straight with me? Do you suppose he brings me all the stuff?"

"Tells me 'e do."

"That I can believe," said the old gentleman severely; "Cockeye is not likely to tell you anything he doesn't want passed on to me. He says he does; well, I tell you he doesn't. Got anything to say to that?"

"It seems queer."

"It'll seem queerer to Cockeye before I've finished with him. Cockeye? Why, I made Cockeye—actually made him! He was sneaking milk-cans when I took him up. That's all right; now we'll see how he gets on without me. I've a little thing now that he might have had. I've been working it up for some time. It's quite a little thing, but it's no sort of trouble or risk.

I could do it myself if it didn't suit me better to do the putting up. It's hardly more than going and fetching; I could almost get a retriever to do it. But if Cockeye had gone and had fetched, and handed all over to me fair and square, it would have been two hundred and fifty golden sovereigns in his pocket that very night. Think of that—two hundred and fifty golden sovereigns. Now he can whistle for them."

"Looks as if it might fit me, grandfawther," said the youth.

"Ah!" the old man said reflectively, "you're so particular about anything you're asked to take up, James."

"Don't put it that way," said James. "I were bit in three places, I were shot in the leg, I damn near broke my neck, and pore Snitcher what were with me is doin' of his tray for it now. All I told you was that it were a bit rough and tumble; and that were in the 'eat of the momint as yer might say. I wasn't grumblin' exactly."

"You're young to be put on a thing like this all alone. It's not like having Snitcher by you to show you the ropes. I never put you on alone before."

"Ev'rythink must 'ave a beginnin'," said James modestly. "You said it was a light job. And o' course I shouldn't egspec' whort Cockeye would."

"That's a comfort," said Mr. Watt, a trifle sarcastically. "You wouldn't get it if you did, but I'm glad, James, to hear that you don't expect it."

"Yer think I'd go throwin' it abart under the nose of the splits, grandfawther, but you're wrong. I ain't thet sort. I'm keerful."

"I know what you boys are, when you get a little money in your pocket. A new suit, yellow boots, off with your girl to some swell place where you both look

like a couple of fools. Doing everything you know to make people believe you've got money, and then surprised if Scotland Yard wants to know how you got it! That's you, isn't it?"

"Not me. Some's like that, but not me; I'm keerful; awst Snitcher if I ain't."

"I will when he comes out. If you want this job, you can have it. Bring me the stuff—it will all go in one pocket—and you shall have a hundred and twenty-five, but it'll be spread over six months, and longer if I find you playing the fool. If you want to spend money, go away to do it. See? Now then take it or leave it."

"O bet your life, I'm on!"

"Very well, then; listen." And the old gentleman began to give a remarkably accurate description of Sandiloes, and the habits of the residents there.

James listened with the greatest attention. He noted every point and made Mr. Watt repeat anything that he failed to grasp the first time. But Mr. Watt was very lucid, and had several little diagrams ready to make things clearer.

"Sounds good," said James. "Soft thing, too. But why didn't yer pizun the dog, grandfawther?"

"For the same reason that I have not put an advertisement in the morning papers to say that you are coming. Besides, you never go near the dog, if you stick to your directions."

"True," said James humbly. "I worn't tryin' ter teach yer anything, grandfawther, but I were bit in three places lawst time, and I never keered about dogs."

"And remember it's a clockwork house. If you're not dead on time, you'll be wrong. Got a watch?"

James produced a silver watch from his pocket. "Very nice watch, and keeps good time. Gent as had it afore me was reg'lar sorry to part with it. They were at Epsom, and a friend of mine told me the gent were inquirin' fur that watch under the gran' stan' in a most agitated wye. Wished 'e 'adn't give it me, arter all, I surpose."

Mr. Watt was lighting the best cigar that was smoked in Hornsey that night. Business over, he unbent a little. He produced whisky and glasses from the sideboard. James rolled a cigarette with quick dirty hands, and as he sipped his liquor made an attempt to get a little more information out of Mr. Watt. Nodding his head in what he presumed to be the direction of the kitchen, he asked:

"Is she right in it or ain't she?"

"She knows," said Mr. Watt, "all that there is any occasion for her to know. Don't talk business to her nor to anyone else, as long as it's my business."

"As if I would! Why, grandfawther, I believe yer tike me fur a byeby. I wouldn't do it nort for all the money yer've gort; and that's more than I shall ever get a sight of in this world." He spoke as if with a pious hope that this little inequality would be redressed in the hereafter. If he had any idea of persuading the old gentleman to make either a statement or disclaimer as to what his possessions really were, he was disappointed. Mr. Watt began to talk about the Grand National, and produced cogent arguments against gambling.

Just before he left, James went fishing once more. "I've knowed you, grandfawther," he said, with an air of reflective reminiscence, "more nor a year now. It's full thirteen months since Snitcher brought me along.



And I don't know no more abart yer nar nor whort I did then. I know your word mye be took; I knows yer puts up jobs, and passes along the stuff. But yer don't speak like the rest of us, and I've knowed many flashier thet 'adn't got 'arf as much of the toff abart 'em as yer 'ave yerself. Sometimes of a night, when I'm lyin' awike, I wunners whort yer was afore yer took up with this game."

"I was a Master of Arts and a priest in Holy Orders."

James left in a roar of laughter. "Close as wax, thet's whort you is," he cried. "Clerk in 'Oly Orders! Thet's a good 'un, grandfawther. Good night to yer. I'll be rarn'd dye arter ter-morrer, early." But, as it happened, though the circumstances which brought it about have nothing to do with this story, Mr. Watt (whose real name was something else) had been precisely what he had told James, and had thence passed through more than one stage before he became a fence and a putter-up of burglaries.

It has already been mentioned that Mr. Paxton Bland's clerks thought him a man of excessive energy; he certainly had enough energy to make an inquiry from Richards as to the representative of Messrs. Orwell and Smith.

Richards was a good-natured and slightly pompous simpleton. He said that, in his opinion, the man from Orwell's was about as ignorant a man as you could find.

Mr. Bland was interested, and asked in what way the ignorance was displayed. It appeared that this wretched Champneys had an idea that he knew how the landed gentry lived. His ideas on this subject had been grotesque, and Richards had been much amused.

“Why, sir, he thought it was usual to dine at six, and for the lady of the house to wear all her diamonds, even when the family was dining alone.” Richards gave other examples of the abysmal ignorance displayed by Champneys as to the life of the upper classes. It turned out that the good-natured Richards had provided him with enlightenment. All this Bland heard with a pleased smile. He had so much energy still left that he rose at five next morning, and went to a little workshop where he was wont to amuse himself, and did several things. The result of what he did was that if anyone moved the short ladder on the brackets outside the wall of the kitchen yard, the hand of a dial in Mr. Bland’s dressing-room informed him of the fact. He took other precautions as well, for although he had guessed what was to happen, he did not know the precise way in which it would happen; but he was inclined to think that the attempt to get Mrs. Bland’s diamonds would be made during the dinner-hour, and that the thief would find the ladder useful.

On the following night James carried out with the greatest precision the directions that he had received from Mr. Watt. He kept clear of the stables where the dog was, and he avoided with equal care the lodge at the entrance to the drive. For the last three miles he had come across country, a lonely country and well-wooded, just the kind of country that James liked. There was no moon, but the stars were rather brighter than James thought necessary; but like a philosopher he tolerated what he was unable to alter. He had committed the plans provided by Mr. Watt to memory, and had no difficulty about finding his way.

His procedure was to be according to ordinary form. That is to say, he was to secure the three doors of the

house so that they could not be opened from inside, or, at any rate, not without difficulty and delay; he was to wire the paths so that a pursuer would trip and fall; at eight precisely he was to enter the window of Mrs. Bland's room by the help of a ladder that he would find on brackets fixed to the wall of the kitchen yard; he was then to lock the door of the room, open the jewel box with a wire, slip the diamonds in his pocket without their cases, descend by the ladder again, and take his departure.

By a quarter to eight he had fixed his wires, and only had to put the finishing touch to the fastening of the doors; he did not intend actually to fasten them until he was quite ready to begin. Then he fetched the ladder and brought it round to the side of the house where it would be required.

Mr. Paxton Bland saw the hand on the dial move, as he was dressing for dinner. Within a minute he had slipped on an ulster that he had ready, dashed downstairs, and let himself out of the front door. He took two skips into the shrubbery near, and there hid himself and waited. In another minute he could just distinguish the under-sized James as he came softly up to the front door, and put in that finishing touch. Then James went round to the other side of the house, to the lawn under Mrs. Bland's windows.

Paxton Bland listened. He could hear the piano in the drawing-room; his wife was playing as she waited for him to come down to dinner. Eight o'clock struck from the stables, and immediately the music ceased. Then he was just able to hear a faint sound on the gravel on the other side of the house; the ladder was just being put into position. He drew a cap from his ulster pocket and put it on, changed the revolver from

the left pocket to the right, and slipped the life-preserver up his sleeve. Then Mr. Paxton Bland thought he would like to get round to the other side of the house also. He went circuitously, availing himself of a belt of shrubs. From his second position he could hear the window being pushed up a little, and recognized the cleverness that opened it so nearly without a sound. Then he saw a light moving about inside the room. What struck him most was the stupendous impudence of the thing—impudence that ninety-nine times out of a hundred might be perfectly successful.

There was now a clear course before an ordinary commonplace, law-abiding citizen. Unquestionably Mr. Paxton Bland should have removed the ladder, whistled the dog, sent a gardener for the police, and caught the burglar in a trap. But I doubt if Mr. Paxton Bland was all these estimable things. It will be remembered that his clerks said he was a devil. I must myself admit he had his own way of doing things.

For the present he stood still and waited. In less than five minutes James descended the ladder again. What happened next may be given from James's point of view.

Everything had gone without a hitch so far; James said to himself that if there was another man in England who could put up a job like grandfather, he should like to meet that man. James had two diamond rings, a diamond necklace, a pearl necklace, a diamond pendant, and a diamond tiara in his pocket, and though he was only going to get a hundred and twenty-five pounds for the lot he felt pleased. He continued to feel pleased until he mounted the boundary fence, and then he no longer felt pleased; on the

contrary, he felt a violent blow on the side of the head, and as he was on the top of the fence at the time he fell heavily and promiscuously. Before he could rise he felt something else unpleasant, and this was a circular rim of cold steel pressed against his temple.

"Lie just as you are," said a deep voice. "Move a finger or speak a word, and you are dead."

James had a revolver himself in his pocket, but considering that that steel rim was where it was, he thought that it was not worth while to move, and he had no desire for conversation. He felt a hand in the pocket where he had put his swag; likewise in the pocket where he kept his revolver. "Stand up," said the same deep voice.

James saw no reason why he should not stand up; he stood, and saw that his assailant was a man too big to fight, even if he had not been armed, a tall man in an ulster and cap.

"Six articles in all," said the man. "Is that all you got?"

"Yuss," said James. "That was all I wanted."

"I have your revolver, and now I want your watch."

"It's a ole silver watch; it ain't wuth nutthink; yer don't——"

Here James was knocked down again, and once more told to stand up. He began to whimper and handed over the watch.

"Any money?"

James produced thirteen-and-threepence.

"That all?"

"Yuss, and goodness knows how I'm goin' ter git 'ome."

"You'll walk, I suppose. Take that stud out of your shirt and give it here."

"The stone ain't real," said James, but he handed it over.

"Anything else?"

"Knife and a bit o' wire," said James, producing them.

Further inquiry brought forth a little tobacco in a paper, a medicine bottle with gin in it, some matches and a candle-end, and a piece of string. After that James maintained that bar his clothes he was skinned.

"Very well," said the man in the ulster. "Now I'll go over you myself, and if you've spoken the truth, I'll give you back threepence to help you on your way home. If you haven't, you're going to die."

The search, as might have been guessed from the readiness with which James submitted to it, yielded no more treasures. The man handed him three pennies, told him to be off, and watched him out of sight.

James did not call on Mr. Watt next morning early; he arrived late in the evening, limping and exhausted. The unattractive housekeeper who admitted him said that he looked like as if he had been left over from a beanfeast. But James had no heart for badinage. To Mr. Watt he told the whole of his story.

"And it does seem a bit 'awd," he said, in conclusion; "when yer done yer best an' took pines, an' got it all in yer pocket, ter 'ave it stole from yer. Stole—thet's whort it was; theer's no other nime fur it. The dirty dog, I 'ope 'e'll swing one o' these days!"

"It's no use talking like that," said Mr. Watt. "You've not got the stuff, and therefore you won't have the money. He marked your face slightly, I see."

"There's nutthing 'e didn't do. Watch gone. Cash

gone. Ev'rything gone. If I'd bin anywheer near 'is size I'd 'ave made a fight of it, an' chanced 'is iron."

"You want a drink, don't you?"

"Thank yer, and that's a pore word fur it."

But no amount of whisky—and he took a good deal—could reconcile James to the hardness of his lot. He renewed his complaints.

"Look here, James," said the old gentleman. "You seem to forget that I'm losing a week's work, and a lot of diamonds just when I can place all I can get, and all through your carelessness. You don't seem to be able to take care of yourself. Now I suppose you'll come bleating to me wanting to be put on to something else."

"It worn't my fault, grandfawther. 'Ow was I ter know thet thievin' swine was waitin' theer an' watchin' of me? Der yer know 'ow I feel abart this?"

"Go on."

"I feel thet if anyone wud give me a thick 'un ter mike a stawt with, I'd swear never ter tike another penny that didn't belong ter me. I've 'ad a sickener."

"Don't say things you don't mean, James."

"Bible oath, I mean it, and 'ud stick ter it, too! I knows more nor one way ter pick up a living honist."

Mr. Watt walked up and down the room twice, pausing to take a sip from his glass each time. Then he sat down, pulled a leather bag from his pocket, extracted a sovereign, and tossed it across to James.

"A sovereign, I think you said. Take it and go. And keep your word. Don't come here again. Good night."

"Hi sye, grandfawther!" James began. But Mr. Watt broke in again:

“Damn you! Go before I change my mind. It’s your chance; take it and stick to it. Go!”

And James, feeling sure now that this life is full of surprises, went. And—which is much more extraordinary—he did keep his word. He is at present doing very well in the grocery line, has his own shop, and if you suggested to him that there was a time when he preferred stealing, I think he would be much hurt.

And Mr. Paxton Bland wears a silver watch and a complacent expression.



## XV

### THE KEY OF THE HEN-HOUSE

**I**T was like this. I mostly took Jimmy Stalside with me when I went egging. He's only a small kid, two forms lower than I am; but he's handy, and does what he's told. We'd gone a partnership in eggs. But this time I hadn't taken him with me, because I hadn't meant egging. I didn't mean to do anything when I went out. However, I was in the small plantation on Linthwaite Fell, and I saw a corby go off a nest, top of a young tree. There was a bit of a wind on, and the tree was blowing about. I felt rather mad. I'd got four corby's eggs already, but I really wanted more; corbies aren't so common, and a few extra are useful for swaps. Yet it was such a thin, young tree that I knew it would snap if I went up, especially with that wind blowing. I stared at it a long time. Then I told myself that, being a young tree, it was probably tough, and would bend down slowly with my weight but not break. If I had only had Jimmy Stalside with me, it would have been all right; the tree would have carried a little chap like him well enough. However, I knew if I left that nest some dirty sneak would prig it while I was away. I thought I might as well chance it. I was about three-quarters of the way up when the thing broke. The ground was soft, and I got a good mouthful of it and made my nose bleed.

I got up slowly and felt myself over. I wasn't much hurt anywhere, but my ankle had a bit of a twist. I put my handkerchief to my nose to stop it bleeding, and limped a step or two to get at the nest which had come down with the tree. There was nothing in it. If there had been it would only have been smashed; but it helped to make me madder than ever. I said out loud:

"All right, Jimmy Stalside, I'll make you sit up for this." You see, if Jimmy had been there I should have sent him up the tree; so naturally I felt savage with him.

I had hardly said these words before I heard a laugh. I turned round and saw a lanky kind of a girl standing close by, in the dark of the trees. She seemed to be a girl about my own age, and she wasn't ugly. She'd got a basket with her, but she put it down on the ground. I daresay she'd been watching me ever since I started climbing. She looked a bit ashamed of herself when she saw I'd caught her.

"Well," I said, "and what are *you* grinning at?"

She put one finger in her mouth and sucked it a moment. I expect she was thinking if she wouldn't pick up her basket and run off without answering. But she didn't. She said:

"Because of your talking to yourself like that. You *are* queer."

"No, I'm not," I said. "You were grinning because I came such a smeller just now, and if you were anything except a girl I'd settle with you for that."

"Oh, but I wasn't! I was frightened. I nearly screamed. Did you hurt yourself much?"

"Twisted my ankle a bit, made my nose bleed, and swallowed a peck of dust and beetles and stuff."

"Why did you go up that tree?"

"Partly because there was a corby's nest at the top, and partly because I was ass enough to think the tree would carry me. I knew all the time it wouldn't really."

"You'll get punished if you smash up the young trees here."

"Got to cop me first." She came a step forward now and stood in the sun. She'd got good long hair. I'd just as soon have that as not, in a girl.

"I've got three corby's eggs," she said.

"Get them yourself?"

"No; my cousin got them for me."

"What's his name?"

"Bill—Bill Helcomb. I'm Marion Helcomb."

"Did you blow the eggs yourself?"

"Yes, I *did*." She seemed regularly triumphant about that.

"Hole at each end—threaded 'em on a bit of cotton?"

"Yes."

"Thought so. Look here, next time you get any eggs, make *one* hole, and make it in the middle. Then blow out the insides with a blow-pipe. You can ask your cousin what a blow-pipe is and how to do it—not that I expect he knows." She seemed interested in what I was saying.

"And then?"

"Then mount it with the hole downwards, so that no hole shows at all. And mount it with *both* names to it. You want eggs to look like eggs. You don't want to make them into a blooming necklace. And you don't want them stuck all over holes like a bit of stamp-paper."

"I see," she said. She looked rather sorrowful. "If mine had been done right I would have given them to you, instead of those you missed just now."

It's awkward when you think anyone's going to be nasty to you and you get a bit nasty to him, and then you find out that he really meant to be rather decent than not. This was what it was with that girl. The hair on her eyelids was longish, too, though I don't know that that matters. I hardly knew what to say. I thanked her very much. I told her that, anyhow, she was a long way ahead of most girls, because most girls haven't the pluck to collect eggs at all.

She looked at me seriously, and said that I ought to do something to stop my nose bleeding.

"I'll have to let it rip," I said. "If I had something cold to put down my back, that does it."

"I've got it," she said, looking as pleased as if she'd found a halfpenny book. "I've just been up to the hen-house to get the eggs, and I've the big key here." She stooped down to her basket and picked it up.

"Do you carry that key on the top of the eggs?" I said.

"Yes."

"It's a wonder it hasn't smashed some of them."

"Well, it hasn't."

"It will, if you aren't careful. Another time put that heavy key at the bottom of the basket and the eggs on the top."

"I will," she said. Anyone would have thought that I was a master, and she was bound to obey me. I was surprised that she didn't argue more.

I slid that key down my back. It was as cold as a penny ice. After a few minutes it did stop the bleeding, and while we were waiting for it to do that I

talked to the girl. I asked her questions and gave her some advice, because she seemed to be a kind of girl that one might make something of.

She told me that she was just on a visit to her uncle, and would only be there another fortnight. I had seen her uncle. He was a rough, common sort of a man to have been related to her. The way I saw her uncle was this: Reggie Winter and I always celebrated the end of term by smoking cigarettes. Once we took our cigarettes and smoked them on a stack belonging to old Helcomb, and he came and caught us. He was properly savage, too, and said he'd report us. But he didn't. That was all I knew about him. I asked her what church she went to, and she told me she generally went to Linthwaite Church. I advised her to come to Manners Church next Sunday; it was no farther to walk than Linthwaite Church was, and the school went to Manners Church. She said she would come, and I told her where she'd better sit. She said that she went to the hen-house on the fell side every afternoon. One of the eggs in the basket came from her own particular hen, and she had marked it with a cross in pencil, so as to know it from the rest. She gave me that egg. If I had had anything about me that I could have given her as a return, I don't know that I shouldn't have done it. But I hadn't anything. By this time my nose had stopped bleeding, and I wanted to give her the key back. But I didn't see how to do it; no more did she.

I tried stooping down so that it might come out where it went in, but it wouldn't stir. Then I tried jumping up and down to get it out the other way, but that wouldn't move it either. It was a big, old key, and somehow or other it had stuck fast. I thought

that the only thing to do would be to strip and get the key out that way. I was just going to tell the girl to go up to the other end of the plantation and wait for me there, when my watch jerked out of my pocket.

"Twelve minutes to four. Call-over's at four, and if I stop another minute I miss it. And if I miss it I'm done."

"Then run, at once," said the girl. "Only you've got my key in your—in your back, you know."

"Look here," I said, "to-morrow isn't a half, and so I can't be here then. But I'll come up between twelve and one, and put the key under the top stone of the wall on the left of the top gate of the plantation. You'll find it there when you want it."

"That will do splendidly. Under the top stone left of the top gate. I won't forget. You're sure it won't slip out while you're running? No? That's all right. Good-bye."

I only just got in time for call-over, and I fancy I made my ankle much worse by the hurry. I didn't quite see, at first, what to do with that egg. If I had been in the sixth I should have had a study to myself, and then I could have boiled it over the gas. But I wasn't in the sixth, and so I hadn't a chance. However, I had a good idea. It was my bath night. The bath seemed very near boiling hot; it was too hot to get into at first, anyhow. So I put the egg in, and sat on the edge and waited till the water was cooler. After about twenty minutes I tried the egg. It wasn't exactly cooked, and it wasn't exactly raw. I've eaten many worse things. Next morning my ankle was just about as bad as it could be. I could hardly bear to put my foot on the ground. However, my notion was that I would go to morning school, hop up to the plantation,

somehow or other, between twelve and one, and put the key in its place, and then go up to the sick-room. As it happened I didn't do that. A house-master caught me limping about after breakfast and sent me up to the sick-room there and then. They bandaged my ankle, put me upon a couch, and wouldn't let me stir.

Then I thought I really was done. I didn't see how I was to get that key back to the place we'd agreed on before the afternoon. And I knew that if I did not get it back that girl would be in for no end of a row. Lying there on my back, I thought of a plan. I knew Reggie Winter would be likely to come up after school to see what was the matter with me, and so he did. He asked me how I'd damaged my foot.

"Doing a champion performance," I said. "I ran from here to the gate in that small plantation in Linthwaite Fell and back again in thirty minutes." Of course, I knew that I could do it in twenty-four, but I said thirty because I wanted to make Reggie Winter say he could do better. And so he did.

"That's a fat champion performance," he said. "Thirty minutes! I'd do it in twenty any day."

"You always did think a lot of your running. Go and do it then. Do it now if you're so sure of yourself, and I'll lay you a bob you *don't* do it in twenty."

"Done with you," he said. I gave him the hen-house key and told him to put it under the top stone on the left-hand side of the gate, so that I should know he'd really been there. I said it was just an old key that I'd picked up. Then I timed him by my watch, and off he went as hard as he could go.

When he'd gone I lay back and chuckled. I thought to myself that I'd made Reggie Winter do my business for me, without even knowing that he was doing it,

and that I should make a bob out of it as well. Then I stopped chuckling, because I remembered that I hadn't told him the top gate, so he'd be certain to go to the gate at the other end of the plantation, which was one minute nearer.

It was as bad as having a tooth out to lie there without being able to move, and think about it. It's bad enough to find out that you've been an idiot at any time, but it's worse to find out that you've been an idiot just when you considered that you were being particularly smart. Then there was the girl; she'd been very friendly, giving me an egg from her own particular hen, and so on; besides, she couldn't have been called bad-looking. It wasn't so pleasant to think what a row she would get into with her uncle, or what she would think of me for not keeping my word, and for losing the key of the hen-house for her. I wondered whether she would tell her uncle about having lent the key to me to put down my back; at least, I didn't wonder much, for I thought it about as sure as death that she wouldn't.

Presently back came Reggie Winter, blowing and panting so that he could hardly speak. He'd taken two minutes thirty-five seconds more than the time he'd betted he'd do it in. He chucked me the shilling, and said that he could have done it in twenty if he had been in running things.

"No, you couldn't, my son," I said. "I doubt if you've been there and back now, in twenty-two thirty-five."

"Well, I'll take my oath I have. Besides, I've put the key where you told me, against the gate; so you can see for yourself, as soon as you stop shamming it here."



"Plucky lot of shamming there is about me, with an ankle swollen up the size of a house! Which gate did you go to?"

"Nearest, of course. There'd have been no sense in going on, sweating up to the top gate."

Wouldn't there just!

I almost wished I'd told Reggie Winter all about the whole thing. I believe he'd have taken the key up to the top gate for me. But then I should have had to give the girl away; and I should have had to give myself away into the bargain. A nice sort of story Reggie Winter would have put all over the place. It's just as well I didn't let him into the secret. In desperation I now thought of Jimmy Stalside. I'd a sort of authority over Jimmy. I could make him do a thing without telling him the reason for it, and that wasn't possible with Reggie Winter. So I said:

"Look here, Reggie, if you're going down you might send Jimmy Stalside up to me."

Presently up came Jimmy. "Hullo," said Jimmy, "you've cooked your ankle jolly well. How did you do that? And what do you want?"

"Look here, Jimmy," I said, "would you chance cutting dinner to-day?"

"Well, I'd sooner cut evening prep. or something of that kind. One gets a bit pecky about this time of day. As far as chancing it goes, I don't mind that; tell the two chaps who generally sit each side of you to close up a bit so as not to leave a vacant place, and warn the girl who waits your side of the table not to sneak, and then there you are; it's ten to one no master spots that you're not there."

"I wanted you to go somewhere and do a thing for me, if you'd cut dinner. You'll be back half an hour

before school, and then you can get a blow-out at Andrew's. Here's a bob to do it on." That was the bob I got from Reggie; so I didn't lose anything on that.

"Is it anything to do with eggs?"

"Yes, it is," I said. If the key of a hen-house hasn't got anything to do with eggs, what has? "You won't see the point of it at first, and if you speak about it to anyone you'll ruin the whole thing. You must just do it on trust, and it will work out very well. I suppose you can keep a secret."

"Well, I should think so. What have I got to do?"

"Go to the plantation on Linthwaite Fell; under the top stone of the wall, left of the lower gate, you'll find a key; take that key and put it again under the top stone of the wall, but this time left of the upper gate."

"All right. But I don't see what that's got to do with eggs."

"I told you that you wouldn't understand it at first, and I can't explain it yet. All you've got to do is to go off and change the position of that key, as I said."

So off he went. I'd hardly hoped to be able to make Jimmy go and do that without telling him any lies; but, you see, I hadn't told him a single lie. I had said that he wouldn't understand it now, but I hadn't told him that he would ever understand it any better. It was a comfort to me to think that the girl would get the key all right now; it made me easier in my mind, and I ate a very good dinner.

I had hardly finished before Jimmy came back and swore that the key was not there at all. He'd been there, and looked both sides of both gates, so as not to make any mistake about it. He seemed to think that I had been playing off some sell upon him.

"No, I haven't," I said. "As it happens, this is a particularly serious business, and I wish to goodness I could make it out."

But I couldn't make it out. There was no doubt that Reggie had put the key there; the fact that he paid up his bet proved that. And there was no doubt that Jimmy had not found the key there when he went; he wouldn't have risked disobeying me and telling me a fib on the top of it; it wouldn't have been worth his while. And I couldn't help thinking about the trouble that girl would get into for losing the key, and all through my fault. You can believe me or not—and most likely you won't—but I hardly slept a wink that night in consequence.

I was not allowed to do any walking until Sunday, and then I went to Manners Church with the rest of the school. I had expected that the girl, being angry with me, wouldn't be there; so, of course, she *was* there, and in the seat that I had told her to take. This seat happened to be exactly opposite mine, so that I could hardly help seeing her. But all during the first part of the service she wouldn't look at me in the least, but kept her eyes down upon her book. Just in the last hymn she looked up for a second, nodded and smiled; it was all done in a flash, and the next moment she had got the usual sort of hymn expression on her face. No one would have seen that nod who had not been watching her pretty closely. I saw that everything must be all right, but I couldn't make out how it had come about. I wanted to give her some sign to tell her to write a note explaining what had happened, to put it in her glove, and drop the glove as she passed me in the churchyard afterwards; so that I could pick it up, get the note out unseen, and return the glove to

her, just as if I were doing an ordinary act of politeness to a girl I had never seen before in my life. I couldn't think of any sign, though, that would express as much as that. Well, it was no good. She didn't look at me again, and she left directly the service was over. The school always stopped, you know, till everybody else had gone out; so there I had to sit and watch her sailing down the aisle.

Next day an extraordinary thing happened. I got three letters from three distinct aunts, none of whom knew that either of the other two were writing, and each letter had a tip in it. The total was two pounds five. Well, I thought to myself that I'd make some provision for the latter end of the term. What I made up my mind to do was to blue one quid in miscellaneous things, and put the rest in the Post Office Savings Bank and draw it out again when I was very hard up. I was going down the village to the post office, when I happened to stop before a jeweller's window. You see, in the village there are lots of trades go to one shop, and the jeweller was also an ironmonger. I didn't want to look at his plated toast-racks and things of that kind. I wanted to see an entirely new rat-trap that he had in his window. As I was looking at it, I noticed a bundle of charms, things that people wear on their watch-chains. There were several of them altogether on one ring; there were a heart, an anchor, a cross, a thing like a diagram out of Euclid, and a silver key. They were marked seven-and-sixpence, but I got them for seven shillings, after a lot of argument. I didn't put any money in the savings bank after all.

Then I waited for Wednesday, and counted the hours. It wasn't so much that I wanted to see the girl and give her the present I had bought for her, as that I

wanted to get the whole thing cleared up. I wanted to know what had happened to the key of the hen-house.

I was in the plantation early on Wednesday afternoon. As I waited there a boy came through the trees with a basket and a key in it. I recognized that basket and that key. I suppose I stared at him; it's not unlikely. At any rate, just after he had gone past me, he turned round and said: "What are you doing, sneaking about here?"

So I said: "Sneak yourself. If you haven't bought this place, you'd better go on and bring the washing home."

Well, he was angry at that, and used very bad language. He walked on a step or two, and then picked up a stone and shied it at me. It went hard, but wide. So I shied back. It was the best shot I ever took in my life. It hit the basket, which he was holding loosely, and sent it spinning. He picked it up, and shouted that he'd come and knock the head off my shoulders. So I told him to come along, and he didn't.

Of course, I saw then that this boy had been sent to get the eggs instead of the girl. He was a common kind of boy, and I shouldn't have much minded if I'd had a bit of a row with him. However, I saw now that the girl wasn't coming. Somehow or other I felt almost as sorry as if I had really cared about it, which, of course, I didn't. What I wanted was to find out about the key. I just gave it all up, and started home.

And when I got to the gate of the plantation there was that girl sitting on it. She was always giving me surprises. She was dressed rather prettily—not that I take much notice how girls are dressed. She smiled at me. I do not mind owning, although I am prejudiced against girls, that I like the way she smiled. It made

you feel as if there were an extra "half," and you'd got let off an "impost" that you'd expected.

Then we began to explain things, both of us talking at once. If she hadn't interrupted me, and had just answered my questions, I should have understood what had happened much sooner. However, I got at it at last. Winter had taken the key and put it against the wrong gate, just as I supposed. Her cousin was up a tree in the plantation at the time, getting a magpie's nest. He saw Winter come busting up as hard as he could run, slip the key under the stone, and then bolt off again. Her cousin thought that a very queer thing for any chap to do, so he came down from his tree and went to have a look. He lifted up the stone and found that it was the key of the hen-house. That fairly puzzled him. He did not see how any boy from the school could have got the key, or why—if he had got it—he should have been in such a mighty hurry to hide it just there. So her cousin picked up the key, went home with it, and told her uncle all about it. Then it seemed that her uncle rather went for her, and told her that she must have been up to some joke with one of the school-lads.

"And what did you say?" I asked.

"I told him I hadn't."

"That *was* a buster."

"No, it wasn't. There hadn't been any joke. It was a very serious accident. You know it was. You were laid up for days with it. I don't tell fibs. Then uncle said I must have given the key to one of the boys, and I told him again that I hadn't."

"Well, anyhow, *that* was a fib."

"Of course it wasn't. I hadn't given the key to anybody. I'd lent it. He didn't ask me if I'd lent it,

or I should have told him. So he said I must have dropped it, and that, as I was so careless, Bill would go to fetch the eggs in future."

"I'm sorry you got into a row about it."

"Oh, it wasn't much; and it wasn't your fault, anyhow. I don't mind—I'm leaving to-morrow."

"I wish you weren't. I might come up here again in the afternoon and——"

She shook her head and smiled. She'd got teeth like the inside of a cocoa-nut. "No," she said. "It wouldn't do."

"Why not?"

"Because it wouldn't."

"That's no reason."

"Besides, they'd suspect. I believe my cousin does suspect now. I don't like him much. Of course, he's awfully kind in the ways of getting me things, and so on."

"Why don't you like him?"

She looked down and waggled her foot. "Oh, well, I don't know, some way. Can't you guess?"

"I saw him in the plantation just now," I said. "I wonder if he knew what I was there for."

She laughed. "Of course he couldn't! You see, you weren't the boy that he saw with the key."

"No. I say—talking about that key—I got this that I wanted to give you." I pulled out the bundle of charms that I had bought.

Now this was a queer thing. I had fully intended to imply somehow that the thing was real silver and I'd given a good deal of money for it. It's not much use being generous unless people know that you really are generous. Yet somehow or other I said the exact opposite. I said:

"It's a sort of memento. You could wear it on a watch-chain; it isn't anything much."

She was very pleased with it. She kept on thanking me over and over again. And she said she didn't think she really ought to take it.

"Yes, you ought and you must," I told her.

"Anyhow, I think I must," she said. "You're a very nice boy. I wish I had got a memento to give you."

Now you may think that what happened next was all a planned thing, and that I had intended it from the first. If so, you're wrong. As a rule, I rather despise girls than not. I suppose that the reason why I said what I did was because this was really, speaking fairly, rather an exceptional kind of girl. It seemed to come over me suddenly. What I said was:

"Give me a kiss, then."

She looked away and shook her head, but didn't say anything.

"Yes, do."

"Couldn't."

I almost asked her if, as she wouldn't kiss me, I might kiss her, but I thought that wouldn't be a good thing to do, because she might refuse again. So I just kissed her without saying anything. She turned white and then crimson. Quite suddenly she did what she had just said she couldn't do. Before I entirely recovered myself she had gone. She ran away through the plantation and I never saw her again.

I shouldn't like this to be generally known. I don't want to spend the rest of my school-days in licking chaps or getting licked by them, and that is what would happen if Reggie Winter or any of them got to hear of it.



## XVI

### ONE HOUR OF FAME

**M**R. BATSON was a picture-frame maker; but this is not to say that he actually made picture-frames. He procured the mouldings in lengths to his esteemed order from the wholesale place in the City; it was Billunt in the workshop down the yard who cut them up and fitted them together.

It was Mr. Batson, however, who conducted all the diplomacy of the business. He took the orders, and by the charm of his manner generally managed to force upon a customer one of the four mouldings which he had in stock. The same charm had occasionally induced artists to deal with him on a cash basis. The charm was reserved strictly for business; in private life he took an interest that was almost virulent in local politics, and not infrequently called his wife a fathead.

Herbert Wymondel was a very great man and a fine novelist. Reviewers had compared him with Guy de Maupassant. He was pessimistic and harrowing. Yet his appearance did not suggest that he could harrow. He was small and delicate, and rather obviously vain.

Now a friend of Wymondel's, who was an artist, had presented him with a small landscape. It was entitled, "The Haunt of the Heron," but in spite of this the hanging committee at the Royal Academy had been reckless enough to reject it.

Wymondel wrote one of the three most graceful letters of thanks that were written that year, and wondered what he should do with that rotten picture. He did not propose to sacrifice any of his valuable wall-space to it. His taste was quite perfect, and his rooms advertised it. With the necessity came the opportunity.

Wymondel's best friend's eldest daughter announced to the world, through the medium of the "Morning Post," her intention of perpetrating almost immediate matrimony. Wymondel decided to bestow upon her "The Haunt of the Heron," and to procure a new, but not necessarily expensive, frame for it. He walked into Mr. Batson's shop.

Mr. Batson's diplomacy was beaten. Wymondel absolutely declined to accept any of the mouldings forced upon him. He was self-assertive and dictatorial, and insisted on seeing the pattern-book. And when he had made his selection, he said the thing would be no good unless he could have it finished and delivered at his rooms by the following morning.

Batson became impressive. "It shall be done, sir. A special messenger will be sent off to our factories, and bring back that moulding at once. Then I shall put two of my best men on to it, and make them work overtime if need be. You shall have it complete by to-morrow morning. You can depend upon me absolutely. And the name and address, sir?"

Wymondel presented Mr. Batson with his visiting-card, and paused for a moment to see the delighted smile of recognition spread over Mr. Batson's face. The smile not arriving, he went out. Mr. Batson did not waste much time in reading novels, had never heard of Herbert Wymondel in his life before, and,

except as a customer, had not the slightest desire to hear of him again.

He opened a door at the back of the shop and called down the yard: "Billunt!"

Billunt—nobody ever called him William Hunt—appeared from the stable, which had been converted into a workshop. He was, on this occasion, to be not only the special messenger, but also two of Mr. Batson's best workmen, as indicated, he being the only man that Mr. Batson employed. He was a clever carpenter, when his mind was not preoccupied by ambition, or his body by intemperance.

"What are you doin'?" asked Mr. Batson.

"Tidyin' up generally," said Billunt.

"Well, you take this here drorin' and measure it up. It's got to be done in 4076, and you must go and fetch the stuff from Cannon Street. Don't try anything on, because I know what the fare is. Take the gent's card, and enter it up in the book, and hurry."

Billunt was not sorry to get out of the workshop for a bit on a fine morning, but hurry was distasteful to him. He took off his apron and put on his coat. He then visited an establishment where he could procure a wash, a shave, ten cigarettes, and a decided opinion upon Mr. Lloyd George for threepence half-penny.

His appearance being now  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent above normal, he entered his train on the Underground. As he had not a first-class ticket, it can hardly be necessary to say that he entered a first-class carriage. At any rate, no one who knew Billunt would have expected anything else.

It happened that opposite to Billunt there was seated a young gentleman of refined appearance, absorbed in

the reading of a six-shilling novel. Billunt, who had the overlooking sense strongly developed, observed that the title of the novel was "The Nethermost Pit." This merely interested him as being the place to which on Saturday nights he sometimes directed Mrs. Hunt to go; but he also noted the name of the author, Herbert Wymondel.

Now where on earth had he seen that name before?

Suddenly it dawned on him. That was the name of the gent on the card, and he had that card in his pocket. Billunt felt that something ought to be done about it. It might be worth a drink, or it might not. In any case, it would form the basis of pleasing conversation, and accentuate his sense of his importance. He crossed over and sat next the young gentleman.

"'Ope you're enjoyin' that little thing of mine," said Billunt.

Billunt was washed and shaved, and was smoking a "Pride of the Hårem" cigarette. It was one of the few occasions of his life on which the end of a two-foot rule was not protruding from one of his pockets. Still, he looked like a carpenter. Further, he looked like a carpenter of low morals and irregular manner of life. The young gentleman, begging his pardon, said he did not understand.

Billunt drew the visiting-card from his pocket and presented it. "That's me," he said impressively. "I did it."

Young Mr. Smith was astonished and delighted. Herbert Wymondel had no more enthusiastic admirer, and Mr. Smith was perusing "The Nethermost Pit" for the second time. The author did not look in the least like what he would have expected, but this seemed to be evidence of his genuineness. People never do fit

in with your preconceived notion of them. Mr. Smith had just time to express his extreme pleasure when the ticket-inspector came along—a ticket-inspector who had seen Billunt once or twice before.

“Season,” said Billunt, in an off-hand and business-like way.

“I don’t think,” said the inspector sardonically; “come on now.”

Billunt produced his ticket. “And that’s the fault of your bloke at the booking-office,” he said. “I arst him for a first, and I paid for a first, and this is what he gives me. Nobody but yourselves to blame for it this time, anyhow.”

“Pay the difference,” said the inspector wearily.

Billunt fumbled in his pocket. “Sorry not to be able to oblige,” he said, “but I left my sovereign-case in my evening clothes, coming back from the Opera last night.”

Smith had not heard all that was said, but he realized the nature of the difficulty. These authors were so absent-minded and careless about money matters. “Permit me, Mr. Wymondel,” said Smith. “You can send it back to me any time.”

Billunt permitted Mr. Smith to appease the ticket-inspector, and said that with these young boys they employed in the booking-office nowadays mistakes were bound to happen. He then passed one hand over his forehead. This he felt would suggest intellect.

“I wonder,” said Smith, “if you would mind my speaking about this book. Of course, I know some authors are so sensitive.”

“A bit that way myself,” said Billunt complacently. “Still, seeing how you got me out of this little difficulty, I dunno that I ought to be stand-offish.”

"I am sure, Mr. Wymondel, that if you knew the tremendous impression that 'The Nethermost Pit' has made upon me—I am now reading it for the second time."

"Yes, it is pretty hot stuff, ain't it," said Billunt.

"Ah, you who made it can speak of it jokingly, but I know men to whom this book is a positive religion, men who would envy me the privilege of meeting you in this way. I have often wondered what the genesis of the book was."

"Genesis," Billunt repeated reflectively. "Well, that's hardly the kind of thing I should care to talk about in a railway carriage. Besides, it's a longish story. Gettin' out here? So am I. It's just possible there might be a place near by where we could discuss it. I don't know if the station has a refreshment-room."

The station had a refreshment-room. At the entrance to it Billunt hesitated. "Coming out without money, like this," he said, "I don't hardly feel as if I ought to."

"But, of course," said Mr. Smith, "that's all right."

"In that case," said Billunt, "mine will be a drop of Scotch."

At the second drink Mr. Smith ventured to suggest that he would like to hear something about the genesis of "The Nethermost Pit."

Billunt said that Genesis reminded him of the name of a horse that he ought to have backed for the Grand National. It was the only time he had ever left the race alone, and it was the only time he had ever been tipped a winner. It was funny how these things happened.

Mr. Smith was young and innocent, but he was

beginning to have grave suspicions. Surely a man who wrote like that could not possibly speak like this.

"Yes, Mr. Wymondel," said Smith. "What I wanted to know was how you came to write that book. What put the idea of it into your mind?"

"Then, why couldn't you have said so before?" asked Billunt, "instead of wasting your time and my own with this talk about genesis. Well, I'll tell you the truth. The thing came over me all of a sudden like."

Billunt's articulation had ceased to be perfect. Mr. Smith looked at him sternly. "This is fraud," he said. "You are not Mr. Wymondel at all."

"See here, my ole pal," said Billunt, "I'll act fairly by you. You stand me one more drink, and I'll tell you whether I am or not."

Mr. Smith was a weak man. He stood him one more.

"All ri'," said Billunt, as he put down his glass. "You've acted like a gennelman to me, and I'm goin' to act like a gennelman to you. As a marrer o' fac', I really am Mr. Blymondiwog, but I don't look like it, and that's been my misfortune all my life. Shake hands on it, ole pal."

Billunt had left for the City at eleven in the morning, with directions to hurry. At twelve he had not returned, and Mr. Batson was beginning to be angry. At four in the afternoon, when Billunt staggered into the shop with a quite inordinate amount of the wrong pattern moulding, Mr. Batson was almost speechless with fury.

Billunt maintained his dignity. He denied absolutely that he was drunk, but made the generous con-

cession that he was not strictly sober. He said what had happened was, that he had simply missed one train after another, which might occur to anybody. He made a generous offer to Mr. Batson to tell him something that would make him laugh, something about a Mr. Mywondigom, who wrote a book called "Hell," but he was not permitted to remain long enough on the premises to execute his purpose.



## XVII

### SARA

THE defendant was Miss Sara Frederica Constantia Hallowes, hereinafter called Sara for short, aged seven, resident at present at 114 Marine Parade, Salton-on-Sea.

The judge was Mrs. Amy Hallowes, aged thirty-two, of the same address, mother of the above.

Jane Shotover, nurse, aged twenty-four, gave evidence as follows:

"It 'appened like thissum. I was setting under the breakwaterum, and I give Misserrer her wooden spide, and I said, 'Now, if you was to build a nice, pretty castle out of sand, then I'd come and look at it, and that would be a s'prise.' She'd give some trouble over me not letting of 'er ride 'er donkey into the sea, and what I wanted was to keep 'er mind off."

Sara: I want the red ink.

The Judge: Hush. Go on, nurse.

"Wellum, she took 'er spide and started off, wanderin' about among the people, which was not what she'd been told. She'd got 'er shoes and stockin's off, and 'er skirts tucked into them mackintosh drors; so I didn't see 'ow she could come to no 'arm. But I kept my hi on 'er, and every now and again I'd sing out to 'er to get on with that castle. There was a old gennelman settin' on the beach, readin' of a piper. Looked to me like something in the insurance line."

The Judge: What made you think that, nurse?

"Wellum, 'e'd got a pile gray felt 'at and was sixty if 'e was a dye, but that may have been just my idea. Any'ow, Misserrer started walkin' round an' round 'im, like a teetotum, and people on the beach larfin' at 'er as might have known better, and I could see he was gettin' annoyed."

The Judge: You ought to have stopped her, nurse.

"So I diddum. At least, so I was goin' to do. But just as I got up with 'er——"

Sara: Can I have the red ink now, mummie?

The Judge: Hush! I want to hear what you've been doing. Well, nurse?

"As I was saying, just as I got up with 'er, she worked round to the back of the insurance gennelman, upped with 'er spide, and brought it down with all 'er force on 'is 'at. Of course, I erpolergized, but I could see he was put out about it, though that was no reason for using the word he did."

Sara: I want to do a pickshur of a insurance wiv his head bleeding. So, can I have the red——

The Judge: Hush, and don't interrupt again.

"Wellum. Them as was larfin' before larfed worse than ever, and I'm shaw the wye some of them lyedies offer 'er chocklits and ler 'er plye with their dogs, which mye be sife or mye not, is nothin' short of a—well, you 'ardly know what to sye to 'em. So I just took and brought 'er strite 'ome."

Sara: And *now* can I have the red ink?

The Judge: Leave her to me, nurse. I'll send her up to you directly.

"Very goodum."

The judge, left alone with Sara, pointed out that she was not to go chattering to strangers, who did not

really want her; and much less was she to walk round and round them; and much, much less was she to beat the pale gray hat of a gentleman with her wooden spade. She had been a naughty child, and was to go up to the nursery for the rest of the morning.

Sara: And can I take the red ink up, too?

That reminded the judge. She did not want Sara to think or talk about terrible or ugly things. A nice-minded little girl would not even wish to make a picture of a poor gentleman with a nasty wound in his head. She would rather think about beautiful things. There were plenty of beautiful things all around us. ("The Young Mother's Handbook." By Charles Baldley Rushington, B.A.)

"What's beautiful?" asked Sara.

The judge sternly repressed an absolutely senseless impulse to say that Sara herself was the most perfectly beautiful thing on earth. She pointed out of the window and asked what could be more beautiful than that field of corn with the poppies dotted all about it?

"Can't do poppies wivout red ink," said Sara.

After Sara had gone to bed that evening, her nurse obtained permission to go out for a breath of fresh air. She met the breath of fresh air on the beach by appointment, and its name was George. He was an honest man, but looked as if his clothes were too much for him.

Jane began to narrate her sorrows to George, and was a little annoyed to find him in no sympathetic depression.

"Ah!" said George, "kids will be kids. Nice little thing she always looks, too."

"And that's what always 'appens," said Jane, with

bitter conviction. "She goes a-dancin' about that beach like some wild Injun, and then lyedies says, 'Isn't she sweetly quaint?' and words like them. I've no patience with it. Well, as I was syin', 'er mother give 'er a talkin' to over what she'd done to the insurance gennelman's 'at, and then she come up to the nursery lookin' as meek as Moses, and both 'er little 'ands under 'er pinafore. 'You come 'ere, Misserrer, and 'ave yer 'air done,' I says, and caught 'old of 'er. I wasn't rough, because that ain't my way, and no gel that was rough could keep my plice for ten minutes. But there—all of a sudden there was that pore child's life-blood gushing out of 'er and streamin' across the floor. Lor', it did give me a turn. I come over quite faint, went as white as a sheet, and might 'ave fallen if it 'adn't bin for the sewing-machine. And there she stood in a reg'lar pool of it, larfin' like anythink."

George seemed mildly puzzled. "Look 'ere," he said, "what are you tellin' us?"

"Well, to make a long story short, it wasn't 'er life-blood. She'd bin botherin' 'er mother to let 'er 'ave the red ink, and 'er mother didn't say 'Yes' and didn't say 'No.' So afore she come up to the nursery, that child slipped into the library and 'id the red ink under 'er pinafore so as I shouldn't tike it awye. And so, as a matter of course——"

Jane broke off her narration in dignified disgust at George's behavior. "Oh, well, George, if it amuses you, perhaps the less I say the better. What you don't seem to see is if that 'adn't bin red ink I should have been a murderer."

## XVIII

### THE BLANKING BUSINESS

I DO not think there are very many men who feel pleased when they are summoned to serve on a special jury. You have to neglect your business or profession—possibly for days at a time—and you get one guinea, of which you return one shilling to the usher. Yet, if you have received the mystical, yellow paper, cannot persuade your doctor to give you a certificate, and have no other legal excuse, it is just as well to obey the summons. By doing so you show that you realize the duties and responsibilities of citizenship, and that is important. By not doing so you may, I am told, get it made unpleasantly warm for you; that also is rather important.

So one dark and foggy morning I found my way with considerable difficulty to Queen's Bench No. 3½. There were other special jurors already there, and we gathered at the back of the court, and discussed probabilities, and grumbled together, while we waited for proceedings to proceed. One man happened to remark, with despairing optimism, that at any rate we got a guinea for doing it.

"I would cheerfully give two to get off it," I said.

At that moment someone touched me on the shoulder, and a pleasant voice said: "Might I have the favor of a word with you, sir?"

I turned round and saw a well-dressed, nice-looking man of about thirty. I did not remember that I had ever seen him before, and I could not think what his business with me could be, but I said, "Certainly. What is it?"

"I must ask you," he said, dropping his voice, "to pardon me for having inadvertently overheard what you said just now. But I understood you to say that you would give two guineas to get off serving on this jury."

"So I would—gladly."

He gave a charming smile. "Quite natural. It is really a great pleasure to me to be able to accommodate you. When your name is called I will answer for you. The officials here know neither you nor me by sight. Briefly, I shall impersonate you with absolute safety. You can pay the two guineas now, immediately after I have answered to your name; or, if you prefer greater security, you can give me an address at which I may call for a similar honorarium after the jury is discharged."

"My good man," I said, "I am always found out. That is my luck. I am frequently found out even when I have done nothing, and if I have done anything then my ultimate exposure is a certainty. I am sorry, but we cannot do business."

He still retained his delightful manner. "Ah!" he said, "then I have troubled you to no purpose. Accept my sincere regret. If you have by any chance a friend here who might possibly require a substitute, a friend who has not your peculiarly unfortunate habit of being found out——"

"Quite so," I said. "Man over there in a fur coat, Gatterley by name, he is required urgently by his busi-

ness this morning. Ask for five. He is wealthy, and if he does it at all he would give that."

This was immoral of me, and I am ashamed of it. The young man smiled, bowed, thanked me, and retired. A minute afterwards I saw him in earnest conversation with Gatterley.

Ultimately my name was called, and I answered. Gatterley's name was also called, and there was an answer. There were twelve of us in the jury-box. But Gatterley was not there, and the young man with the pleasant manners was.

I met Gatterley shortly afterwards. "Hullo," I said. "We were both called the other day, but I didn't see you in the box."

"Ssh!" said Gatterley. "I wasn't there. Bought a substitute for ten pounds—a most gentlemanly young fellow. It was worth twenty times that to me to be at the office that morning. Perfectly safe, you know."

"I'm disgusted with you," I said. "You have no right to shirk your duties as a citizen. Who was your substitute?"

"A man I'd never seen before—called himself Mr. Blank."

"Any address?"

"None."

I was sorry for that, because Mr. Blank was beginning to have some interest for me, and it would have amused me to see him again.

Chance threw him in my way about a year afterwards. I saw him enter a first-class smoking compartment at Waterloo. He was wearing a moustache—previously he had been clean-shaven—but otherwise he was unchanged. He thanked the porter who handed in his rugs and hat-box most cordially, but did not give

him the customary coppers. I felt sure it was Mr. Blank, and took particular care to enter the same compartment.

He recognized me at once, and remembered fully the circumstances under which we had previously met—that he had offered to impersonate me on a special jury for the sum of two guineas, and that I had been afraid to risk it. “You see,” he said, with the air of uprightness and candor, “I make no pretense of not knowing you, or of denying what occurred.” The train moved off. “We are alone in the compartment,” he said, “and I detest secrecy unless it is essential. To you I should especially wish to be open, for I owe you a debt of gratitude. You introduced me to your friend, Mr. Gatterley, who seemed particularly anxious to get to his business that morning. In consequence I represented him (unworthily, but to the best of my ability) on the jury, receiving an honorarium of fifteen pounds—the highest that I ever received for similar services.”

I believe that fifteen was the real figure. Gatterley told me ten, but he always says that he had paid less than he really did pay in order to get himself a character for sharpness.

“The highest that you ever received? Do you mean that you make it a business of impersonating jurors?”

“It is merely a branch of my business. It brings me in an income at the rate of two hundred and fifty pounds a year while I am at it. But I do not practise it for more than a few months in the year. The monotony would make it tiresome; and the risk of detection would be too great. Yes, I use disguises—slight disguises—a change of facial expression, the addition



of a pair of spectacles, a different overcoat, and, of course, I change my courts, and occasionally absent myself altogether. I left the Law Courts this morning, by the way."

"And now?"

"Now," he said, "I am going to have rather a bad accident. When I get over that I shall go into the country and get bitten by a lot of dogs. I am not mad—these are different branches of my business."

"I confess that I don't understand it."

"I should describe it as a blanking business. In the law courts I am a blank, and can be filled up with the name of any special juror who requires my services. As for the accident, you will observe that the door of this carriage is not properly fastened. No; it is not, as a matter of fact, the neglect of the company's servants, for I arranged it like that myself. When we are coming into Vauxhall Station I shall stand up to get something off the rack; the jolting of the train will throw me against the door; the door being improperly fastened will fly open, and I shall fall out on the platform. As I shall not hurt myself in the least—having done this kind of thing before—and as it will not be accidental, I may call it a blank accident. I fill up the blanks with neglect on the part of the company's servants and severe nervous shock to myself. I fancy the company will sooner pay me ten pounds for compensation than let me bring an action."

"Suppose they won't?"

"Then I shall go to a good solicitor, bring my action, and most certainly win it. If you had served on as many juries as I have you would know that a jury will always, where possible (and sometimes where impos-

sible), give a verdict for an individual against a company.”

“And about the dog-bites?”

“They are also blanks. I mark down houses where noisy, snappy little beasts are kept as watch-dogs; then I dress myself to look as nearly as possible as if I were making twenty-four shillings a week. I take a stick and wait until one of those dogs runs out. Then I irritate it—it barks and growls. I keep it off me with the stick, go up to the front door and ring; then I say that I have been bitten by the dog. I do not ask for compensation—I say that I am going to prosecute, and want to know the name of the people who live there. The lady of the house (I never call when the man’s at home) generally begs me to accept compensation. I grumble, but consent. The compensation runs from ten to thirty shillings, and I can get six dog-bites in a morning. It is not a bad branch of the blanking business.”

“What do you do, if the lady wants to see the bite?”

“She very rarely does. If she does, I always paint a dog-bite on my left calf before I start out to work, and I can show her that. I can paint a very decent dog-bite. But we are getting into Vauxhall, and I must say good-bye. Charmed to have met you once more. Now for the accident.”

In a moment he was gone. With his hat-box in one hand and his bundle of rugs in the other, he had fallen out through the door. I saw a crowd gather round him. I saw them carrying his apparently senseless form into a waiting-room, and then the train moved off.

. . . . .

I saw him a third and last time. It was some little time afterwards, and again it was in a railway carriage. He entered my compartment and greeted me in his usual pleasant, courteous manner. But I thought he looked less cheerful than before. I asked him why he remained standing, instead of sitting down: "Is it part of the blanking business?"

"It is connected with it," he said.

"How about that accident of yours at Vauxhall? Was it a success?"

"Complete. You see, I know *how* to fall; and, besides, that bundle of rugs comes in very usefully. You must really let me show you the trick of it one of these days, as you are good enough to be interested in it."

"And the railway company?"

"They were most reasonable—treated me in a liberal spirit that I appreciated fully."

"How about the dog-bites in the country?"

"Not quite so successful. I made between six and seven pounds the first day with blank dog-bites. But on the next, as I was keeping a nasty little terrier off in front, a St. Bernard came up behind—and—well, that particular dog-bite wasn't a blank."

"And are you going back to sit on juries?"

"No," he said, rather sadly, "I shouldn't care for any sedentary work just now."

I do not think I shall take to the blanking business myself. It seems to have drawbacks. I must content myself with a career of modest and unsensational honesty. But I could not persuade the pleasant-looking young man to give the thing up. On the contrary, he told me that he was about to take up with a little blank

sanitary inspecting. It is simple. You get admission to a house as a sanitary inspector, and you leave it with anything you can pick up. He has a plausible manner, and I recommend householders to be on their guard.

## XIX

### THE CHEAT

MRS. INGELBY and her niece lived at The White House in the middle of the village High Street; but the house stood far back from the street, with a walled garden shaded by many shrubberies in front of it. Mrs. Ingelby loved shade and privacy. For this reason she would have built herself a house further away from the village, were it not that she liked one thing better still, and this was the thing to which she had always been used. She had been born in The White House, and she would die in it. In the course of nature this would happen in a few years, for she was of a great age.

This night, in the drawing-room, a rather elderly maid—she had been with Mrs. Ingelby for the last twenty years—lit the wax candles on the card-table, and put the new packs in their appointed order with the whist-markers. This was in the days before the world knew bridge, and Mrs. Ingelby would have scorned to learn it in any case. She had always played whist, and therefore she would continue to play it. Her game had no modern innovations in it, was fairly sound, but far from being perfect. She preferred a “dummy” game, and always took dummy herself. “Then,” she said, “there can be no discussions.” She knew her own weakness. In the course of her whist

experience there had been some very emphatic discussions, and she herself had done most of the discussing.

Her husband, a man of mild and forbearing temper, would stick with a plaintive obstinacy to his side of the question. His last words before he died were: "Admitting that I did not see the call, my dear, I must still maintain that it was highly injudicious in you to call at all." Her last words to him were: "Stuff and nonsense!"

She mourned his death in solitude for many months, and then her niece Marjory came to live with her. Marjory said that she wished to play whist. Mrs. Ingelby hesitated. Was it decent? As she was doing it merely to oblige the child, she decided that it was decent. She sent for the doctor to dine with her that night, and played whist afterwards until nearly eleven o'clock. She won ninepence, and went to bed triumphant. After that, the question of propriety was not raised again, and there was a whist party every week. There was always someone in the village who could be asked to make a third at the table. As a matter of fact, she would far sooner have played with her own butler than not have played at all. In the game of cards her youth was renewed. The struggle for life was all over with her now, and she was in a quiet backwater of old age without temptations or ambitions, with no risks to take, and with nothing to scheme over. At the card-table the delightful struggle began again—she was once more in the full current, triumphing or vanquished.

Mrs. Ingelby walked with some slight difficulty, but without further support than her stick, into the drawing-room, followed by Marjory and the vicar. Mrs. Ingelby wore black silk and no jewels. She might

have exchanged the lace on her dress for diamonds, and got some very fair diamonds for it, but she loved lace, and accused precious stones of vulgarity. Marjory, a girl of eighteen, wore gray and looked demure, but with humorous possibilities about her. She was quite the prettiest girl in the village, and fully aware of it. The vicar, who came last, was a pleasant and scholarly man. He preached good sermons and he liked good port. As an angler, his fame was great: the trout they had been eating at dinner had been the victims of his skill.

"How would it be," said Mrs. Ingelby, as if she were making an entirely new proposition, "if I were to take dummy?"

The idea was well received, as usual. "Then," said Mrs. Ingelby, as the maid placed the cushions in her chair for her, "shall we say threepenny points?"

It was, and had always been, threepenny points; but it was just as well to mention it in case of accidents.

"Jane, have you placed the ash-tray and match-box for Mr. Vaughan?" Jane had, and having for the moment done all that she could do, Jane retired, not to reappear until ten o'clock, when she brought in a tray, and Mrs. Ingelby took one glass of very weak whisky and soda, always under protest. These little things were arranged and fixed. The vicar and Marjory and Jane all knew their parts.

And now a silence reigned, and the battle raged on the green cloth. But to-night it could hardly be called a battle. The vicar and Marjory held all the cards. Mrs. Ingelby struggled hard but ineffectually; no amount of skill could have saved her from defeat.

There was a pause at the end of the first rubber.

"The cards have been remarkable," said Mrs. In-

gelby, "very remarkable. Very remarkable, indeed. This kind of thing cannot possibly continue, and so decided an inequality of fortune deprives the game of much of its interest, to my mind."

"Well, now, your revenge?" said Mr. Vaughan.

"Yes," said Mrs. Ingelby, "I think there will be time for it; and, as I said, luck like yours cannot last. Two trebles and the rub. I think that's right. Marjory, it is your deal."

Then the terrible thing happened. Halfway through Marjory's deal Mrs. Ingelby stood up. "We will not continue this game," she said. "I am afraid I must believe the evidence of my own eyes. You are not dealing fairly. You are cheating!"

"Impossible!" said the vicar.

Marjory only said that she was sorry, and blushed slightly.

"I think," said Mrs. Ingelby to Marjory, "you had better leave us. Go to your own room."

Without a word Marjory went out. It was extremely embarrassing for the vicar. He also had risen to go.

"Pray sit down again," said Mrs. Ingelby. "This is a serious matter. I hardly know what I should do."

"Can't understand it," said the vicar. "The girl wasn't playing for points; and even if she had been, it was only the other day that you complained that she gave away her money as fast as she got it. Surely you must have made some mistake!"

"I made none. Apart from the fact that she did not deny it, I felt pretty sure that she had neutralized the cut. I know something of conjuring tricks myself. At each round my card fell from the bottom of the pack, and not from the top. It was done fairly well,



and quickly; but not quickly enough to deceive my eyes, old though they are."

"Then I'll tell you what," said the vicar. "It must have been done for a joke. I should say no more about it."

"On the contrary," said Mrs. Ingelby, "I shall say a great deal more about it. I trust that it was only a joke; but Marjory must be made to understand that there are some subjects that do not admit of jokes, and that whist is one of them."

And then a tray was brought in, and Mrs. Ingelby said that she would not have any, thank you; and Mr. Vaughan mixed it for her.

One afternoon in the following week Marjory called at the Vicarage. Could the vicar come over and dine that night and play whist afterwards?

"Certainly!" said the vicar. "Delighted. Many thanks. And are you going to be allowed to be one of the whist party, my dear?"

"Oh, yes!" she said. "I am entirely forgiven."

"Look here!" said the vicar. "I am not a curious man, as a rule, but I wish you'd tell me what on earth you did it for. By the way, I must return to your aunt the points that I received over that first rubber. I had forgotten that."

"Oh, no, you mustn't!" said Marjory. "I never cheated at all in the first rubber."

"Well," said the vicar, "this beats me. The luck was all with us, and you were doing splendidly. Why on earth should you——?"

"Don't you see?" Marjory broke in. "It was because the luck was all on our side. She manages herself beautifully, and doesn't complain much; but if she

hasn't won a game all the evening, she is perfectly miserable, and doesn't sleep all night. I was giving her the loveliest hand when she found me out. Spades would have been the trumps, and she had the four honors and a little one, and a long suit in diamonds. I have done it before often, and have never been found out."

"Well, you must have made your partner lose three-pences."

"Yes," said Marjory cheerfully. "That doesn't matter a bit, does it? Whereas, if old ladies get upset and can't sleep, that is very bad for their health."

"And, naturally, when you told her this, she forgave you?"

Marjory's eyes opened wide. "Told her it? Told her that she'd been treated as a child and allowed to win? How could I, or anyone else, be so cruel? You must never breathe a word of it to her. I found she had decided to take it merely as a stupid joke, and to imagine that when the game was over I had intended to own up, anyhow. So that was how I left it."

"So you ask a man in my position to assist you in this fraud?"

"It's a pious fraud," said Marjory.

"Well, possibly I may. But what about to-night?"

"To-night," said Marjory, "will be just like the other nights. I shall play fairly for the first rubber. If my aunt loses that, I think her luck's very likely to improve afterwards. There are lots of ways of doing it, and I have been taught them all."

"Then," said the vicar, "you're a card-sharper, my dear; but I believe you're not such a bad sort of girl, in spite of it."

## XX

### THE DIFFICULT CASE

#### A DUOLOGUE FOR ONE PERSON

*THE two persons of the Dialogue are the PATIENT and the DOCTOR. The part of the PATIENT is played in the usual way. The DOCTOR has no actual representative on the stage: he is supposed to be present, and is supposed to speak: the vividness with which he is realized will depend on the skill of the Actor who plays the PATIENT. In the programmes the part is assigned to the imagination of the audience.*

*The scene is the Library of a Country House. The Time is the Morning.*

*The PATIENT is seated at the writing-table in the Library. He is a young man, tanned, of healthy appearance, but a little worried and distraught in manner. He is writing as the Curtain rises.*

#### THE PATIENT.

*“Whene’er I gaze on Celia’s golden locks——”*

Now that’s not at all a bad line, and runs you straight on into the next:

*“Whene’er I gaze on Celia’s golden locks,  
I simply feel I——”*

M'yes. I thought the pace was a bit too good to last. Golden locks. Let's see. Locks, crocks, fox, socks. No go. "Whene'er I gaze on—" Oh, d——!

*(He flings down his pen and rises from the table.)*

Yes, and what am I doing it for? Same thing came over me yesterday and the day before. *(Draws papers from his pocket.)* "My Heart's Idol"—six verses. "To Celia's Eyes"—seventeen verses. And I'm supposed to be an officer and a gentleman. If my man found these when he was brushing my clothes, or if anyone in the regiment got to hear of it—well, I should simply have to leave the country. A mere girl could never have that effect on me: not if I were well. *(Glances at his watch.)* I only hope that when he does come he won't be afraid to speak out, as some doctors are. Even if it's anything mental, I'd sooner know it. But it seems a bit rough. All these years I've done my duty. *(A pause.)* Well, more or less. At any rate, I've never written a line of anything that could be called poetry, and now it's just as if I couldn't keep off it. Let's see. "Whene'er I gaze on—" Ah! that's got it.

*The PATIENT on his way to the writing-table is arrested by opening of door C at imaginary entry of the DOCTOR, and goes quickly up to it. The PATIENT closes the door, goes through business of shaking hands, comes down, places two chairs and takes one, talking as he does so.*

*(The points at which the DOCTOR is supposed to speak are indicated by asterisk lines.)*

Good morning, Doctor. This is very good of you. So you got my message all right—I hate these beastly telephones myself. Well, won't you sit down?

\* \* \* \* \*

It is, indeed. Mind, it looked a bit like rain this morning early. Still, you couldn't want a finer day than it is now.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yes, I know I ought to be out with the others. But my shooting's gone right off. Yesterday I was perfectly ashamed of myself. But then that's only one symptom out of many. In fact, that's why I asked you to come round. I want you to tell me exactly what the trouble is.

\* \* \* \* \*

No, I dare say I don't look ill, but you doctors know that one can't go much by looks.

\* \* \* \* \*

The other symptoms? Well, there are lots of 'em. The worst is a kind of unsettled feeling. What I mean is this: when I ought to be thinking about other things, I'm not. See?

\* \* \* \* \*

Well, I don't know how else to put it. The kind of thing that makes you forget which suit your partner discarded. Then, my sleep's not as good as it was. My appetite's falling off, too.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now, that's a funny question. How am I to remember what I had for breakfast this morning? Let's see. Grilled sole. Couple of eggs. Curry—not much curry.

\* \* \* \* \*

No, nothing else. Well, yes, a bit of cold grouse. Not the whole bird, mind. Of course, you don't count toast, and marmalade, and things like that?

\* \* \* \* \*

I don't see that at all. I didn't say that my appetite had gone altogether. I said it was falling off. So it is. At the present moment, for instance, I've no inclination for food.

\* \* \* \* \*

Certainly. Show you it with pleasure. (*Puts out his tongue.*) I should tell you, perhaps, that I've no actual pain. Still, I suppose there could be some insidious form of indigestion, when a chap might not know——

\* \* \* \* \*

What? Tongue's all right, is it? That seems queer. You'd like to feel my pulse. (*Holds out his wrist.*) I dare say you'll find it racing a bit. The feeling I've got is rather on the feverish side. Ah! the pulse soon tells, don't it? I know a man who——

\* \* \* \* \*

What? You surprise me. Absolutely normal? Is it, indeed?

\* \* \* \* \*

Oh, no. Of course, if you say so, I believe it.

\* \* \* \* \*

No.

\* \* \* \* \*

Not at all.

\* \* \* \* \*

Never in my life.

\* \* \* \* \*

Oh, come, Doctor, it's rather early to say that, isn't it? I guessed that my case was a pretty difficult one. I realized that there might be complications. I never supposed that you'd be able to—er—give it a name all in a minute. But to turn round and tell me I'm perfectly well—that's simply running away from it. Why don't you ask me more questions? You've got a stethoscope—why don't you examine my heart?

\* \* \* \* \*

Very likely. Still, it would relieve my anxiety if you did. (*Takes off his coat and waistcoat.*) And I'll tell you why—I've thought all along that this might be some subtle, masked form of brain-mischief.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yes, I know perfectly well that my brain's not in my chest—why, that's one of the things you learn at school. All the same, everything's connected with everything else, ain't it?

\* \* \* \* \*

Very well, I promise you. If you find my heart's all right, I won't bother you any more, and I'll take your word for it there's nothing the matter. Now then, how do I stand? Like this? Right. (*Business of stethoscoping.*)

\* \* \* \* \*

What? Well, you haven't taken long about it. (*Putting on coat and waistcoat, as if rejecting offer of assistance.*) Thanks, I can manage.

Well, I must keep my word. It's a bit disappointing. I did think that with a stethoscope you would have found something, if you'd been really trying. However, I won't bother you any more. Of course, if for your own satisfaction you said you'd like to take my temperature, I shouldn't—

\* \* \* \* \*

Remind you of what?

\* \* \* \* \*

Lady Caroline and the thermometer—no, I never heard that one. Come on. Let's have it.

\* \* \* \* \*



Oh, stuff and nonsense! I shan't tell anybody, and you needn't give the real names. Besides, I haven't heard a really good yarn for weeks. You positively must. Ah, that's right.

*(He draws his chair closer. Listening attitude.)*

\* \* \* \* \*

All right. Call him anything—call him Smith.

\* \* \* \* \*

I see.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yes, yes.

\* \* \* \* \*

But what had she done with the other one?

\* \* \* \* \*

*(Roars of laughter.)*

Oh, that's good. That's one of the best. That's absolutely perfect. *(With sudden seriousness.)* But, Doctor, you know, this sort of depression of mine is no laughing matter.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yes, that's true. I hadn't meant to allude to it again. But I don't like to leave it like this. You see, you haven't even suggested anything.

\* \* \* \* \*

Come, now, that's better. I shouldn't wonder if a tonic did me a lot of good. You'd like to write the prescription; you'll find ink and everything here.

(*Business of establishing the DOCTOR at the writing-table. PATIENT leaves him: then turns sharply.*)

\* \* \* \* \*

What? "Whene'er I gaze on Celia's——" Good Lord! I'd forgotten I left it there. All right, Doctor. I admit it. I did it. It's my poetry. No one is to blame but myself.

\* \* \* \* \*

Depends what you mean by "going on for long." It's been going on ever since I met her. (*Draws paper from his pocket.*) This is one I did yesterday. It's called "To Celia's Eyes." I'll read you some of it: "Whene'er I gaze on Celia's——"

\* \* \* \* \*

No, it's not at all the same as the one you've got there. It's only that there's a bit of a coincidence about the first lines. This one is much more finished:

"Whene'er I gaze on Celia's lovely eyes,  
They always seem to take me by surprise.  
They are as blue as is the sky above,  
And enough to make any man feel the power of——"

\* \* \* \* \*

All right; if you don't want to hear it, you needn't.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yes; I admit I ought to have told you about it before. It's a mistake to have any secrets from one's doctor. But I have no wish to be regarded as a poet. It would ruin me in my career. I depend upon your professional discretion.

\* \* \* \* \*

I've no doubt it would make a very good story. So did Lady Caroline and the thermometer. A little mutual forbearance, eh?

\* \* \* \* \*

Then, that's settled.

\* \* \* \* \*

You surprise me. I'd no idea you would regard these poems as symptomatic. Then you know what my disease is. Tell me quickly, Doctor. Whatever it is, I can bear it.

\* \* \* \* \*

I'm in love, am I? Yes, I'd been half afraid of it. Doctor, what is to be done? Is there any certain cure for love?

\* \* \* \* \*

There is? What is it?

\* \* \* \* \*

It's all very well to say Matrimony, but how's a man like myself to get there? I'm nothing to look at. Intellect, I should say, very little above the average. No particular position.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yes; but there are three good lives between me and that. Besides, there is the girl herself to be considered. I suppose you don't know who the girl is?

\* \* \* \* \*

How on earth did you know?

\* \* \* \* \*

Of course. The names on the poems. What a Sherlock Holmes you are!

\* \* \* \* \*

Everybody knows it! Somehow, I always seem to be the last person to hear of anything. But, as I was saying, even if I were the Emperor of Timbuctoo, it wouldn't be much good if the girl had taken a dislike to me. Now, I'll give you an instance. I told her that I should stop in this morning, and rather hinted that she might do the same. Not a bit of it. Wouldn't hear of it. She was going with the rest.

\* \* \* \* \*

What's that?

\* \* \* \* \*

Just as you came in? Why on earth can't girls say what they really mean? Whereabout in the garden was she?

\* \* \* \* \*

Why, that's just by this window. What a lot of time I have been wasting!

*(He goes to the window).*

Yes, there she is, reading some rotten book. If she'd only look up—ah!

*(He smiles and waves his hand, and returns hurriedly to the DOCTOR.)*

Doctor, I can't thank you enough. You've done me a lot of good. Now I positively must not waste one more moment of your time. I know how valuable it is. Sure you won't have a cigar to smoke on your way back?

\* \* \* \* \*

No, don't bother about the prescription. That will be all right. And, I say, you'll excuse me if I don't see you further than this door? You know your way, of course. The fact is, that this is rather a busy morning with me. See you on Wednesday at the golf—I've got a rotten handicap myself. Many thanks, again. Good-bye.

*(Business of shaking hands. The PATIENT opens and closes door C. Then goes quickly to the window and calls down.)*

I say, should I be too much of an interruption? Thanks, awfully. I'll jump for it.

## XXI

### SOME IMITATIONS

#### I

**M**Y cousin Elsa is the despair of her mother and the ecstasy of every artist who beholds her. Men adore her until they know her, and she has the longest list of broken engagements of any woman in London. She has great charm and a system of ethics of which an ordinary house-breaker or card-sharper would be heartily ashamed.

When she called on me at twelve in the morning, thereby interrupting my work, and observed that friendship was a lost art, I naturally asked who he was.

"If you wouldn't keep on trying to be clever," said Elsa, "it would be much better. There is no man in the case at all this time. Besides, if it had been any trouble with a man in it I could probably have arranged it myself. I've often done so before."

"You have?" I said. "Well, what is the trouble this time?"

"Suppose I asked you to go to Mrs. Talford Green's on Wednesday night?"

"I should say I was awfully sorry, but that I was too busy and too old for that kind of thing. I should add, in a humble style, that you would find many other men there, and I should only be in your way."

Elsa stamped her foot impatiently. "Once more, don't be clever. Don't jump to conclusions. I never said I was going, did I? I'm not. I don't go to every blessed thing I'm asked to."

"Don't brag. I know you too well, and it's no good. You go to Mrs. Talford Green's whenever you get the chance, and are thankful. And why on earth am I to go if you don't intend to be there?"

"I particularly want you to meet Irma Morrice."

"Why? I've met her scores of times. I know she's your dearest friend, and absolutely delightful and perfectly ducksy, and all the rest of it. All the same, if we don't meet on Wednesday night neither of us will die of it."

"Did I say she was my dearest friend? She is a friend, of course, in a way, and I wouldn't say a word against her."

"Let's have the word, then."

"More cleverness! Why don't you keep it for those little penny stories that you write? Irma's pretty, of course, and I dare say she will learn how her hair ought to be done one of these days. It's not her fault that she's got no money, and I always wondered how she managed to dress so well on it until I heard about the Exchange. She doesn't dress really well, of course, and she has the finest luck at bridge I ever came across in my life, if it is simply luck. And I hope it is, of course."

"Yes, that all sounds very nice. And why do you want me to meet her?"

"You really ought to go out a great deal more than you do. If you don't study life, how can you write about it properly? I heard someone say the other



day that you were the kindest and most chivalrous of men."

This was conclusive. My cousin Elsa does not say these things for nothing. If she stroked a cat she would expect the animal to go away, skin itself, get the skin dyed imitation mink, and send it to her with an affectionate message.

"Evidently," I said, "you're in some pretty serious trouble."

She picked up a little Italian looking-glass and peered into it carefully, and, as she was surveying her own face, found therein no fault at all. "I want to ask you something," she said. "Suppose I got somebody to lend me money on some diamonds. And—well—they weren't really diamonds?"

"A term of imprisonment with hard labor. You ought to have been either in a prison or madhouse long ago. I've often told you so. If you want me to help you you must put your cards on the table at any rate. I must have the whole story."

"It isn't quite what I said—about borrowing the money, I mean—but it's pretty bad. If I told mamma there'd be the most awful row. I suppose I'd better tell you, only you must promise not to peach, and you must promise to get me out of it. Take me out to lunch somewhere and then we can talk it over."

. . . . .

## II

DURING luncheon Elsa was appallingly scandalous and extremely amusing. When lunch was over she leaned forward confidentially, one arm resting on the table.

"Now I'm going to tell you about it. It's the worst mess I ever got into in my life, and it's not my fault at all."

"I knew it wasn't your fault, of course."

"Do you remember that little diamond pendant that Uncle Harry gave me?"

"No."

"You wouldn't. You never see anything. I've got it on now. Look. Well, you know the way that women will go mad on some particular piece of jewelry. Irma Morrice went mad on my pendant. I believe she half thought I might give it her one day when I had got tired of it. I couldn't do that, because it was a present from dear Uncle Harry. Besides, I took it to a jeweller the day he gave it to me, and the man said it was worth at least fifty pounds."

"Pleasant little trick of yours."

"Don't interrupt. One day I was going down Bond Street and I came across a pendant in a window which was the very exact image of mine. I went in and asked to look at it, and found that the stones were paste, and that it wasn't too dear. I had to buy it for safety. Otherwise Irma might have seen it and got it, and I hate to have her wearing anything like anything that I wear. That's natural, isn't it? Then I lost two watches in one week, and mamma said I ought to be more careful. So I thought that in future I would keep the pendant with the real stones safely locked up at home and wear the other. I only knew them apart by the fact that I kept the real one in a different shaped box to the other. Then one afternoon Irma had got a bridge-party, just a few of us, all girls. I never held such absolutely awful cards in my life."

“And,” I suggested, “to pay your losses you borrowed money on the imitation pendant, asserting that the stones were real.”

Elsa was indignant. “Not a bit. Do you think I would tell a lie like that? And do you think I would go into a horrible, dirty, disgraceful pawnbroker’s shop to get money? Never. I would sooner owe any amount than do such a thing. What happened was this: I paid the money at the time, and then when the rest had gone I had a few words with Irma. You see, I had to pay Mathilde some money next day (she’s a demon for money, and if she hadn’t got quite perfect taste, I’d leave her). So I suggested that I should pay the money in a month’s time, and meanwhile I would let Irma wear my pendant, and I told her that if I didn’t pay at the end of the month she could keep it. I didn’t say ‘diamond pendant’—I simply said ‘pendant.’ And I couldn’t help what she thought, could I? She jumped at it, so I took it off and gave it her.”

“What were your losses?”

“Somewhere about ten pounds.”

“And you let her believe that she held as security a pendant worth fifty?”

“I couldn’t help what she thought,” said Elsa petulantly. “I told you that before.”

“And what had you actually paid for the paste pendant?”

“Four pounds ten shillings.”

She looked pathetic and deeply wronged as she gave me this account of her own dishonorable and disgusting conduct. If she had not been an irresponsible, ignorant, and charming child I might have been even angrier with her. “Well,” I said, “there is only one thing to be done. I’ll put you into a hansom, and you

must drive to the Morrises' at once. You will then pay your card debt to Irma and take back your Brummagem pendant. And I ought to tell your mother, and you ought to be well spanked. You can repay me when you have it."

"Thanks," said Elsa sadly, "it's awfully kind of you, but I'm afraid it's no good. Irma has found me out already, and that's why I wanted you to go to Mrs. Talford Green's and talk to her and hear what she meant to do, and see if you couldn't make her change her mind."

By this time Elsa had got actual tears in her eyes. Her appearance of being deeply injured by a hard and cruel world was so deceptive that it nearly took me in.

"How do you know that Irma has found you out?"

"I'll tell you. The other day I happened to tread on a brooch of mine and the silly thing broke; so I took it to a very good man I know of. As I went into the shop I saw Irma standing at the counter, and behind the counter a shopman with that pendant of mine in his hand. I'm not quite certain whether Irma saw me, but I think she did. I rushed out of the shop at once. That happened yesterday. I can't go on Wednesday night because I simply can't meet her. I never meant to do any harm. I had heaps of money coming at the end of the month, and I was quite certain to pay her and take the pendant back then. No harm would have been done at all if she hadn't found me out. It was a suspicious, low, catlike thing for her to do, taking that pendant to a jeweller."

"Well," I said, "I'll do what I can. Only, my dear Elsa, you've got to make me a few promises."

They were promises connected with her reformation.

She made them all with the utmost willingness and kept one or two of them for quite a long time.

. . . . .

## III

I MET Miss Morrice on Wednesday night, and I was a little puzzled, for if ever a woman looked the picture of conscious guilt and horrible embarrassment, that woman was Irma Morrice. We talked about nothing in particular for a moment or two, and parted.

Later I took Miss Morrice down to supper. She clearly had something on her mind, and I thought I would give her the weaker position by letting her speak first.

She asked me if Elsa was there. "No," I said, "she told me she wasn't coming to-night."

"Do you know why?"

"No," I lied.

"I don't believe she'll ever speak to me again. And she was quite my dearest friend, and I'm afraid it's partly my own fault."

"Can't I do anything?" I suggested.

"You might, perhaps, be able to give her my explanation of a thing that must have looked perfectly horrible. She lost a little money to me at bridge, and as her dressmaker was bothering her, I wouldn't take it until she got her next quarter's allowance. So she insisted on my wearing a little pendant of hers that I admired until the money was paid."

"I know all about that," I said. "In fact, she gave me the money to hand on to you to-night. But what's the trouble?"

“Out of pure curiosity and nothing else I took that pendant to a jeweller. I wanted to know how much it was worth. I thought perhaps I would get one like it one day. As he held it in his hand Elsa came into the shop. I could see she was furious. She must have thought that I suspected her and was getting the thing valued. It’s too horrible and sordid.”

“Don’t say that,” I said. “This is a commercial age. By the way, that little pendant of hers is rather good, isn’t it?”

“The man told me he would give me fifty-two pounds for it any time. But, tell me, will you try and make it all right with Elsa? I couldn’t bear to lose her.”

I said I would do my best, and I did.

Elsa had, of course, mixed the two pendants, as she was bound to do. The reconciliation took place, and Elsa told me all about it afterwards. She said she was very saintly and martyrish at the interview between her and Irma, and that she had told Irma that she had never been angry with her—only pained and grieved. And then Elsa asked me not to laugh.

## XXII

### THE CELESTIAL'S EDITORSHIP

#### I

**T**HE Celestial (this was merely his nickname), having finished dinner, collected his faithful follower Smithson, and proceeded down the hill from the schoolhouse to Hunley's. He paused several times on the way, once in an unsuccessful attempt to make a pug dog bite Smithson, and once in order to make Smithson jump a low stone wall by the roadside. Smithson was compelled to jump this wall at intervals when the Celestial decided that it was good for him. Once in every five times Smithson cleared the wall, which was distinctly disappointing, but the other four times he fell, and there were few people who could get more comic illustration into a fall than Smithson. This time he was particularly good; in fact, the Celestial had to climb up on the wall and sit there until he had recovered himself.

"I'll bet this is the last time I ever go at that beastly thing," said Smithson, and he rubbed his shin.

"So you said before, my son. It won't do. A chap who can fall like you ought to belong to the nation."

When they reached Hunley's the little shop was full.

"Banks," said the Celestial, "kindly step down from that throne."

Banks was occupying the one chair in the shop; he got down under protest, and the Celestial, having taken unto himself three raspberry-jam tartlets and a stick of chocolate, and commanded a vanilla ice to be ready for him the moment he had finished, observed with a deeply serious air that we all ate and drank far too much.

"Seen the 'Mag'?" somebody asked.

"No," said the Celestial.

"It's out this morning."

"It can stop out," said the Celestial. "I am not going to look at it. It is all run for the sixth and the masters. Real talent isn't given a chance. At any rate, they chucked me," he added modestly.

There was a general chorus of disbelief that the Celestial had ever sent any contribution in. He had many eccentricities, but no one had ever accused him of a literary turn of mind. Smithson expressed a decided opinion that the Celestial could not write anything even if he wanted to.

"All right, Fathead," said the Celestial: "if I didn't value this particular tartlet I'd break it over your face. I tell you I did send something in, and it did get chucked; and if you don't believe me you can ask the noble and scholarly Pilkington, who is the editor thereof."

"What did you send?" asked Smithson.

"I sent a short essay entitled 'Hoppers; their treatment in sickness and in health.'"

As the senior mathematical master, a man of small size and great agility, was known throughout the school as "The Hopper," the rejection of Cyprian Langsdyke's article may be easily understood, quite apart from any question of its literary merits.



"If you will kindly cease this unmannerly and intempestive laughter," said the Celestial, with an excellent imitation of his head master's manner of speech, "I will give you a few thoughts that have occurred to me on this subject. (Fathead, eat one of these green things with the red stripe around them, and tell me if they're any good.) The school magazine is rot. It contains reports of concerts telling us how the swan-like voice of Smithson was heard to great advantage; it informs us that the Rev. J. B. Jiggers"—this was a purely imaginary name—"has kindly presented to the school library a volume entitled 'What a Little Girl can do'; it gives up poems by the noble and scholarly Pilkington, and it chucks a few trenchant and witty remarks by the brutal and licentious Langsdyke." He took his adjectives from the history he happened to be reading (under compulsion) at the time. "The only thing that is any good is the match scores; and, barring the out-matches, we generally know a lot more about them than the magazine does. It has been well observed by the immortal Lecky, or some other bounder, that without competition trade cannot thrive. It is the same thing here. What we want is an opposition magazine of our own, with me to edit it."

"You'd never get Pilkington or any of these chaps to write for it," said Banks.

"Oh, my sacred aunt!" said the Celestial, "do you think we want Pilkington? Do you think we want a yard and a half of poetry called 'Thoughts on a Summer Evening'? Avaunt! We don't want the sixth, and we don't want the masters. If they come in at all, they will come in as the subject of a few critical editorial remarks. My magazine will be a

society magazine. It will tell you all the real news. It will show up abuses. It will give character-sketches of great and notable people, such as Henry Reginald Liggers, M.A., likewise the Hopper. It will be in manuscript, and Smithson will have to write it out. Everybody who wants to read the number will have to pay a penny, and the surplus, after paying expenses, will go to the Banana Society."

The Banana Society had also been invented by the Celestial. Its aim was to provide a small fund to enable the society to buy bananas in great quantities when they were two a penny. Such cheapness was temporary, and without a fund full advantage could not be taken of it.

The discussion of the magazine continued, and various duties were assigned. Banks, for instance, was required to provide accurate information as to all the head master's dinner-parties, including a list of the guests and an exact transcript of the menu. Douglas was to furnish short biographies of any visitors at the schoolhouse.

"That's all very funny," said Douglas, "but how am I to get 'em?"

"That is your look-out," said the Celestial. "You've got a tongue in your head. 'If you do not see what you want, kindly ask for it.' In that way we shall rise on stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things, as the josses remarked who did the stuff that the sixth had to cork into Elegiacs this morning."

"How did you know?" asked Smithson.

"Because, Fathead, I heard the stuff being given out to them."

"And that don't explain how you remembered it," said Smithson, who never remembered anything.

"Well," said the Celestial, "I cannot stop to explain it to you, because I am just about to give my celebrated imitation of a lion-hearted English school-boy cutting cricket on a beastly hot Saturday afternoon, and getting a surreptitious swim in the river Wathy."

"I'll come too," said Smithson.

"You will bet your last boots you won't. As Socrates very pointedly observes, where one can slink out all right two may be missed."

## II

IN due course of time "Langsdyke's Home Truths" made a successful appeal to its limited public. The method of production was original, and has not yet been followed by the bulk of the leading London magazines. The Celestial lay at full length on his back on a table in the day-room, having in his hand the rough pencil-notes of news given to him by his accomplished staff. Smithson knelt on the floor with a penny exercise-book and his inkpot on a form beside him, and took down the paragraphs that his editor dictated to him. The magazine consisted almost entirely of paragraphs. The following are some of the more elegant extracts from the first number:—

"Anyone who is reading this magazine is requested to keep it in his locker when he isn't.

"We would wish to ask, as a matter of public interest, whether the pro. is not intended to coach the eleven, and if it is necessary for him to waste half an hour every day sending easy ones down for the Hopper to hit, so that he may fancy himself.

"We are informed by the Secretary of the Banana Society that the price of this fine and succulent fruit at Mr. Stanforth's emporium is now 1½d. each. They are pretty big ones, but that does not excuse it. It is a great pity that chaps with more money than brains should encourage it by buying them. It would show more public spirit if we all held aloof, and then, when they all began to go brown, old Stanforth would have to climb down a bit. Bananas of this size at 2 for 1d., even if they had begun to go a little, would be eminently desirable.

"General Mayne (or Mayner) has been stopping at the schoolhouse. He took lunch at the school dinner yesterday, and sat next to the noble and scholarly Pilkington. We are given to understand that the gallant general was something or other in Afghanistan. The remaining details of his life are unknown. Pilkington was heard to observe in conversation that he was not a bad old cock.

"In the match against the Hopper's team last Saturday, our esteemed collaborator Mr. Banks, in a frantic attempt to prevent a cricket-ball from pulping his face, found that the ball had accidentally stuck to his hands. As he has been speaking rather freely about catching their best bat, we think it well to give this information.

"The noble and scholarly Pilkington has purchased three neckties. He also inquired the price of pearl pins, but no business resulted."

The tone of the magazine was decidedly personal, and that made talk. The Celestial was far from thirsting for fame, but it happened that even that great man Pilkington, editor of the legitimate school maga-

zine, prefect, and in both the team and the eleven, heard of it, and tackled the Celestial on the subject. "What's all this about your magazine, Langsdyke?" he asked.

"It's nothing much," said the Celestial modestly. "You see, we thought it might do to practise in, and perhaps later we might get to be good enough for the real magazine."

"Well," said Pilkington, "as far as you are concerned, you might be good enough already. Anyhow, it's no good sending in things which are aimed at masters. You're too beastly cheeky."

"I see," said the Celestial sadly.

"However, I said I'd like just to run my eye over the thing. Bring two or three of the numbers up to my study, will you?"

The Celestial ran over his back numbers in his mind, and could not recall a single one which did not contain remarks of a personal nature likely to be offensive to Pilkington, so, as he was not hungering and thirsting for a licking, he said that he should be very glad—and forgot about it. When Pilkington reminded him later, the back numbers were not to be found. In Pilkington's presence the Celestial inquired most diligently for these back numbers from Smithson and Banks and all the others. They none of them seemed to know anything.

But as time went on the Celestial grew lazy, and deputed the greater part of his work to Smithson. Consequently one number appeared of which the Celestial had never seen the last page, and when he saw it he was angry. "It's no good talking to you, Fat-head," he said; "you've got no sense. Just read that

through again." He pointed to the offending paragraph.

"Yes," said Smithson brightly, "I did almost think of leaving it out; but it was Duncan who sent it in, and he might have turned shirty, and I was in a hurry to get the thing finished, and——"

"All right," said the Celestial: "no one else has seen it. You black it right out, and I'll go and have a talk with Mr. Duncan."

The Celestial's interview, like almost everything that he did, was half in fun and half serious. A superficial observer might have thought that Duncan was merely being ragged. Duncan, who had every means of knowing, was under the impression that he was being licked. The chastisement was deserved. It was all right to chaff the Hopper and the other masters, but this paragraph dealt with that very different thing, a master's wife—a lady, moreover, who was extremely popular in the school. As the Celestial observed, even if the lady in question were not beautiful, it was no reason for a sandy-haired pudding-faced pig of the prairies like Duncan to call attention to it. The chastisement was administered smiling, and it left Duncan with a strong desire to propitiate the Celestial.

Now, Smithson was above all things a slow, conscientious, and painstaking boy. He had been told by the Celestial, his lord and master, to black out the offending paragraph, and he had only got a "G" pen to do it with. He decided that a "J" pen was necessary to execute the job thoroughly, and as Dobson in the junior day-room had an entire box of "J" pens, Smithson went off to appropriate one. It was while he was absent that Mr. Liggers sauntered into the

room and took up the paper. His eye fell on the offending paragraph. He had just finished it when another master called to him, and he went off to play fives. He had forgotten to confiscate the paper, but he could do that later. When his game was over he went to his own rooms, and the page-boy who waited upon the masters in the schoolhouse came down to the day-room to say that Mr. Liggers wished to see Langsdyke.

"See that?" said the Celestial cheerfully. "He loves me so much that he cannot keep away from me even for one hour." There was at this time almost perpetual warfare between Mr. Liggers and the Celestial. "Go back again," he said sternly to the page-boy, "and tell Mr. Liggers that I regard a message like that as cheek, and if I get any repetition of it I shall write to his parents and stop his pocket-money."

The page-boy grinned.

Two minutes later an extremely polite Langsdyke knocked at the door of Mr. Liggers's room.

"I wish to see you, Langsdyke," said Mr. Liggers, "with reference to some sort of publication in manuscript that I found on the table in the day-room. It bears your name, and I suppose you are responsible for it?"

"Yes, sir," said the Celestial.

"I did not examine it at length, but it appeared to me to contain a good deal of impertinence."

"It was not intended to be shown to the masters, sir."

"Quite so," said Mr. Liggers—"quite so. I see the justice of that plea. We do not expect you always to speak of us with the same respect with which you

speak to us, but if you speak disrespectfully of us and allow us to overhear, you have to take the consequences. If you produce a magazine and leave it about where we can find it, you must take the consequences of that also."

"Strictly speaking," said Langsdyke, "it shouldn't have been left about. We made a rule that it was to be kept in the lockers when it wasn't being read."

"Well, well," said Mr. Liggers, "I can settle afterwards what we will do about your precious magazine. What I wanted to speak about particularly was one paragraph in it dealing with the wife of one of the masters. You let that paragraph go in?"

"Yes, sir," said the Celestial.

"Well, I don't expect much from you, but I thought you were more of a man than that. Who wrote it?"

The Celestial hesitated. "Well, practically I did," he said.

"There is no 'practically' about it. You did or you didn't."

"Then I did," said the Celestial.

"Then you will learn for me by heart the first chorus in the 'Agamemnon.' If it were any use I would ask you to try to behave more like a gentleman in the future, but I do not think it is. Boys of the type that would do that kind of thing would be better out of the place altogether, and that is how I expect you will end, Langsdyke. Now you can go, and send up that number of your magazine to me at once."

Langsdyke was extremely angry as he came down the stone stairs. He could not, of course, have given Smithson away, or Duncan, more especially as he had already punished Duncan himself; still, he did



not much like being spoken to in that way, and it was only the fear that on some further investigation the real culprit might be discovered that made him submit quietly.

There were many inquiries when he got back to the day-room as to what Mr. Liggers had wanted.

"He wanted," said the Celestial, "to know if I could come to tea next Sunday to meet the Emperor of Gigaboo. I explained that I drew the line at emperors, and in a fit of uncontrollable passion the bouncer has given me the first chorus to learn by heart.—Smithson, Æschylus forward. Show Agamemnon."

### III

AFTER dinner that night Mr. Liggers unbosomed himself to Mr. Dunham, another master, in the school-house.

"You have sometimes accused me," said Mr. Liggers, "of being a bit too rough with that chap Langsdyke."

"So you are," said Dunham. "The Celestial's all right."

"Well, I happen to know he isn't." Here he produced the number of "Langsdyke's Home Truths." "This is a pleasant little amateur magazine that he has been running, and I'll ask you to hear what this chivalrous little beast has to say about Mrs. Morris." He turned to the place in the magazine, and looked blank amazement. "Why," he said, "the paragraph has all been deleted. Look at that."

"Yes," said Dunham: "a very artistic piece of work. It would take at least ten minutes to black it out like that. When was it done?"

Liggers wrinkled his forehead, and could find no way out of it. "When I sent for Langsdyke he certainly didn't know that I had ever seen the magazine. When he left me I told him to send it up to me at once: there would have been no time to delete anything at all, especially in that finished style."

"Then here are a few simple deductions. The thing was deleted before you ever made any row about it."

"It would seem so," Mr. Liggers admitted.

"And it was deleted by the Celestial, or by his order, for I think the rest of the senior day-room know that he is a dangerous chap to play games with."

"That may be so."

"It must be so. Now, if he deleted it, you may be absolutely certain that he did not write it."

"But he told me himself that he did write it."

"That is just what I should have expected from that boy. You see, this magazine is 'No. 5': I doubt if he would be able to keep up an active interest for the space of five numbers; he would hand the work over to the faithful Smithson, or somebody else in his crowd."

"Well," said Mr. Liggers snappishly, "if he chooses to tell me a direct lie, he must take the consequences."

"Oh, yes," said Dunham, "it was a direct lie right enough, though he wasn't lying for his own sake. However, let us be moral. What are the consequences?"

"The first chorus of the 'Agamemnon' by heart."

"Never mind that," said Dunham. "You probably told the chap he was a cad."

"So would you in my place."

"Very possibly," said Dunham. "If I had I should take it back."

"Well, I shan't."

Dunham changed the subject abruptly, and spoke of a coming cricket match.

"Why should I?" said Mr. Liggers peevishly.

"Because you think you should," said Dunham.

"Very well. Anything for peace and quietness. I shall see him in prep. to-night."

"I have been looking over your magazine, Langsdyke," said Mr. Liggers judicially, "and I see that the paragraph to which I particularly objected has been deleted. When was that done?"

"Done this morning, sir."

"In that case perhaps I expressed myself too strongly when I saw you upstairs. It seems that after all you had some sparks of decent feeling. That being so, and on the understanding that the magazine is discontinued, you need not finish that chorus in the 'Agamemnon.'"

"Thanks very much, sir," said Langsdyke; "but I knew it by heart before you gave it to me to do. I learnt it for fun, and I'd only got to freshen it up a bit."

"Bring me your 'Agamemnon.' Now, then, begin."

The Celestial repeated the chorus from beginning to end with an occasional hesitation, but he required no prompting.

"That's very good," said Mr. Liggers briefly.

Later, when all the boys had gone to bed, and he and Dunham sat smoking together, Mr. Liggers sud-

denly broke off from the subject in hand to say: "If there is one thing in this world that I cannot understand, it is that chap Langsdyke."

"That," said Dunham dryly, "has always been fairly obvious."

## XXIII

### THE TENWOOD WITCH

**M**R. AMBROSE KAY made his living by being born with money, marrying some more, and inheriting the rest. There is no other method of making a living which throws so little strain upon the maker, and if this way were more generally adopted it is probable that much grumbling and discontent would be avoided. Ambrose Kay had a sweet and gentle disposition, never having felt any strain of any kind. He never grumbled about his house in Hill Street, and he was careful not to speak about Tenwood Manor in the county of Sussex at all, because if he had spoken he would have bragged. He thought Tenwood to be in every respect perfection in spite of its gruesome tradition; he loved the place. He was always rather formal, and at the age of forty his round eyes peered through gold-rimmed glasses and his speech was slow and precise. Strangers were generally a little surprised when they found that he was a good sportsman, of an old-fashioned type. He had married at twenty-five a good-natured tomboy of a girl seven years younger than himself, and the marriage had been eminently happy.

But no man is so happily placed that he may avoid all anxieties, and Ambrose Kay had his share of them. There was, for instance, the time when his hair was

getting thin on the top. There was a long period of struggle. Specialists were called in; flagrant and impossible quacks were not disdained. One remedy followed another. There were gleams of hope occasionally in a night of despair—times when he would come down to breakfast and tell his wife that he thought he had really hit on the right stuff at last. But one by one the gleams died out, and an inexorable looking-glass assured him that the struggle had gone against him. That anxiety was all over now. James had long ago cleared the majestic array of ineffective bottles from Mr. Kay's dressing-room. Ambrose Kay was quite resigned now, and the crown of his head was completely bald. He was still anxious about his figure. He kept a weighing-machine in his dressing-room, and consulted it at regular intervals. And here his war with fortune was more successful. On the days when that stupid machine made insulting disclosures of a gain of flesh, Ambrose Kay became appallingly strenuous. The time which was not given to violent exercise was time lost. At the table he became an ascetic, partaking of specially prepared dishes from which everything at all amusing had been rigorously excluded. And he always triumphed; the weighing-machine admitted the loss of the requisite number of pounds, and for a while Ambrose Kay was happy and himself again. But he was still anxious; at any time it might be necessary to begin the struggle again.

But his chief and most persistent anxiety was his only child Victoria, just fourteen at the time of this story. He was most seriously troubled on the subject of her health, which was excellent. He worried continually about her education, and the formation of her

character, and the books she read, and the pony she rode. Ordinary parental care would have looked like stark neglect beside the multitudinous solitudes of Ambrose Kay. Never was any child so hygienically fed and clothed as Victoria, so protected and waddled in cotton-wool, so meticulously administered. Few nursemaids had been able to keep up to the high standard that Mr. Kay demanded for Victoria for more than a month or two. The world was ransacked to find a governess of perfection for her. Her pony had been subjected to tests that would have found out the weak points of a canonized saint, and was without doubt the safest pony in Sussex. Victoria surveyed it all with wondering eyes, and called the pony an old sheep.

It occurred to many people, Victoria included, that Mr. Kay rather overdid it. "After all," her mother observed, "she's not ill, you know. She's not even delicate."

"Possibly not," Mr. Kay admitted, "possibly not. But there's the nervous constitution to consider. Only to-day I discovered (fortunately in time) that Mrs. Annarsley had given her that book of Hans Andersen's. I will not allow her to hear anything whatever about fairies, or ghosts, or ogres, or any supernatural nonsense of that kind. That's the way that children are tortured and their nerves ruined for life."

"Don't know," said Mrs. Kay meditatively. "I used to read Hans Andersen, and my nerves have come out of it all right. And the child lives in a haunted house, anyhow."

"Please don't revive that old story; we know that there's nothing in it, and it's best forgotten."

"Well, the Tenwood Witch died here."

"Some old woman who was so called died here undoubtedly. That is the only scrap of truth in the whole thing. Nothing has ever occurred to make us believe that the house is haunted."

"The servants talk among themselves at times."

"Servants will always talk. If any one of them breathes a word on the subject to Victoria it will mean instant dismissal, and they know it. If there had been anything ghostly to see or hear, you or I would have come across it."

"I suppose so."

"And it's not only Victoria I'm thinking about. You know how nervous Alicia is, and she's sleeping in the haunted room—I mean the room that was once said to be haunted."

Alicia was Lady Alicia Medley, a distant cousin of Ambrose Kay's. She was unmarried, sixty years old, melancholy, and gifted with a fine capacity for believing almost anything. She was particularly great at amateur doctoring and dispensing. She never visited Tenwood without discovering that Victoria needed "a little something." This time she insisted upon cod-liver oil. Victoria loathed cod-liver oil, and to say that she loved her Aunt Alicia would be a misrepresentation of fact. The only other Christmas guests who had arrived so far were Mr. Annersley and his wife—the lady who had been indiscreet enough to present Victoria with "Hans Andersen"—and their daughter Judith, a girl of about the same age of Victoria and her dearest and most intimate friend.

As the two girls crossed the park that afternoon Miss Judith Annersley observed that the surrounding scenery was rather decent, and that one ought to have a pretty good time at Tenwood.



"Think so, Judy?" said Victoria. "It wouldn't be so rotten if it weren't for the grown-ups."

Miss Annersley protested that she had found Mr. and Mrs. Kay rather decent—in which apparently they resembled the scenery.

"Dear papa's all right," said Victoria, "when I'm handling him alone. He's an awful muff about me, but I can generally work things somehow."

"Queer too," said Judith, "because he's not a muff other ways—I mean to say he's a good shot and all that."

"Yes, but he's got me on his mind and on his nerves, and now that he's got Aunt Alicia to back him it's no joke. Judy, that woman's a holy terror. It's cod-liver oil at present. But she's taken the carriage and driven off to the chemist's this afternoon, so goodness knows what it will be next. She says that at this season of the year the young and thoughtless (that's you and me) are apt to try their digestions severely, and it is as well to have a few useful correctives on hand. Those were her own blessed words."

"I say," said Miss Judith Annersley, "couldn't we shunt her?"

"Don't I wish we could!" said Victoria, with fervor. "She's an utter and complete cat, and I wouldn't much mind what I did. Mind you, you're not safe, Judy. She was on to your mother this morning, saying that you didn't look robust, and she could recommend a tonic. I had that tonic myself last year, and it was enough to poison an elephant."

"I don't know why she shouldn't go," said Judith pensively. "And I've got an idea that wouldn't be half bad."

They discussed that idea at great length.

. . . . .

Lady Alicia Medley looked pale and haggard at breakfast next morning. In answer to kind inquiries from Victoria and her friend Judith, she admitted that she had not slept well. Later in the morning she had a serious interview with Mr. and Mrs. Kay.

"Ethel," said Lady Alicia solemnly, "I am sorry to have to tell you that I cannot be one of your Christmas party this year. I cannot, in fact, spend one more night under this roof, and I leave by the afternoon train. And, if you take my advice, you also will leave this house as soon as may be and at any cost, and never return to it."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Kay, "I'm awfully sorry. This is very sudden. What has been happening?"

Lady Alicia Medley observed that there were more things in heaven and earth than Ambrose supposed. She had had a strange and awful experience, one which she would never forget, and wished never to go through again.

"You don't mean to say that you think you've seen——"

"No, Ambrose, I do not think I've seen. I am not that kind of woman. I have actually seen the historic ghost of this house—the Tenwood Witch—and seen as clearly as I see you now."

"This is too extraordinary. Are you sure you didn't dream it?" Mrs. Kay asked.

"Not being a complete imbecile, Ethel, I know whether I am awake or not. When this occurrence happened I was wideawake."

“Do tell us about it.”

“Like yourselves, I discredited the story of the Tenwood Witch. I have slept in the haunted room often on previous visits, and have neither seen nor heard anything unusual. I never expected to see anything, and I am not a nervous woman. If I felt anything approaching to nerves I should take Thatcher’s All-round Tonic or some other suitable remedy. I have been told that I am particularly cool and clear-headed, and certainly I am not a person to imagine things.”

“Certainly not.”

“Very well. At a quarter to two this morning I was awakened by an icy breath passing over my face. I looked round and saw that the door of my room was slowly opening. As it opened the moonlight streamed in from the big window on the other side of the passage, so that I could see distinctly and beyond the possibility of any mistake. And suddenly there in the doorway stood the figure of the Tenwood Witch—a bent old woman with a shawl over her head and a cloak that reached to the ground. I could not see the face very well, but in dress and general appearance she closely resembled the portrait of the Tenwood Witch in the county history.”

Mr. Kay made a mental note that Victoria must on no account be allowed to consult the county history.

“In one hand the figure held a great staff, the twisted bough of some tree, and with this it made threatening gestures. When I looked again it had gone—vanished without the faintest sound of a foot-step. I waited a little, and then I switched on the light, got up, and shut and locked the door. That was all, but it was enough. I am sorry, but I must go.

My maid is packing my things at this moment—she feels quite as I do about it.”

Lady Alicia's account of what had happened was not strictly accurate. I doubt very much if she ever felt that icy breath. Nor was it true that the footsteps were absolutely noiseless. I happen to know that the Tenwood Witch on this occasion was wearing tennis shoes, in order to step as quietly as possible, but she was not absolutely noiseless. Lady Alicia remained obdurate. No persuasions could move her. “No, Ethel,” she said, “I'll come and see you in Hill Street with pleasure, but never again in this house. And if you take my advice you'll sell the place at once.”

“But she did dream it,” said Ambrose Kay to his wife when they were left alone.

“Yes, unless someone was playing a practical joke on her.”

“I don't think it likely. Of course, I don't believe a word of the nonsense any more than you do, but we must take steps at once to prevent any word of this getting to Victoria's ears.”

“You think Vic would be frightened?”

“I can't say. She appears high-spirited, but I am convinced that the nervous constitution is there. Children have been frightened into lunatic asylums by these stupid ghost stories before now. Unfortunately, Alicia told her maid, and there can be no doubt that the maid will have told our own servants. I must see to it immediately.”

Ambrose Kay developed as much energy as if his weighing-machine had recorded a three-pound increase. Long before Lady Alicia had left the house every servant in the house knew that if they breathed one

word of what had happened to Miss Victoria Kay their portion would be instant dismissal, with, in all probability, a long term of penal servitude to follow.

"Ambrose," said Lady Alicia sternly, just before her departure, "I can see by your manner that you disbelieve me."

"Not at all," said Ambrose. "I'm sure you thought you saw what you say. These illusions do sometimes happen, especially when one is not quite awake."

"Really, you're extremely trying, Ambrose. I don't have illusions. I saw what was there, and I will not run the risk of another similar shock to my nerves."

"You could have any of the other bedrooms, of course. It's only the room you had that is supposed to be haunted. You used to laugh at it."

"That was before I had this awful experience. Nothing would induce me to spend another night in the house. And in my opinion you will be acting very wrongly if you do not warn your other guests and let them visit you later, when you've sold this place and have a decent house where this kind of thing does not happen."

"But, you know, I can't sell this place, even if I wanted to. It's to go to Victoria. And if I warned people about a ghost they'd either laugh at me or think that I was making excuses because I didn't want them."

"Well, I have done my duty. I have warned the Annersleys, and I am sorry to say that they treated the matter in a very flippant and frivolous manner. Possibly by this time to-morrow they will be sorry they did not leave when I did. You may be sorry also."

As Ambrose Kay watched the carriage vanish down

the drive he did not feel absolutely heartbroken at the loss. They had done their duty in asking her, but she was rather a lugubrious old lady, and did not add to the enjoyment of a Christmas house-party. Besides, he felt a little doubtful about Lady Alicia's indiscriminate prescriptions. If Victoria needed medicine, would it not after all be as well that the medicine should be given by a regular doctor? And, finally, he was annoyed with her for her attempt to detach the Annersleys. She was of the family, and could come and go as she pleased or as her nightmares might happen to move her; but what right had she to try to spoil his Christmas house-party?

An idea occurred to him. If Lady Alicia had told the Annersleys all about it, it was just possible that they might be mad enough to speak of it in the presence of Victoria. Obviously, it was of no use to muzzle the servants if the visitors were free to do the harm. He could picture Victoria in a madhouse, her nervous constitution wrecked from the terror inspired by indiscreet revelations of the spirit world. He sought for Mrs. Annersley at once.

She treated the matter as a joke, but was quite willing to promise to say nothing to Victoria about it. "Still," she added, "why not let her share the fun? I told Judith, and she doesn't seem much upset by it."

"Ah, but possibly Judith has not Victoria's nervous constitution, and children often suffer terribly from these things when they are too proud to admit it. Dear me, there is Judith in the garden with Victoria. If you don't mind, I think I'll just say a word to her."

He went down and secured Judith. "I say, my dear, I believe you've heard why Lady Alicia left so

suddenly. Now, of course, I know that she never saw any ghost at all."

"So do I," said Judith.

"Sensible girl. There are no such things as ghosts. Still, it might be as well not to tell Victoria. She is not quite so strong-minded as you are. She has a nervous constitution. A thing like that might keep her awake at night. So don't tell her why Lady Alicia left."

"All right," said Judith seriously, "I won't tell her," and then, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, she broke into a wild burst of uncontrollable laughter. She apologized breathlessly as soon as she could speak, and explained that her father and mother had made fun of it; she supposed that was why she had laughed.

"I see," said Mr. Kay, but he shook his head seriously.

"I assure you," he told his wife afterwards, "that the child, Judith Annersley, was on the verge of hysteria. Of course she would not confess that she was frightened, and tried to make me believe that she was rather amused than not, but I could see very well that she was not herself. I'm really sorry we ever asked that old cat here at all; why should everybody suffer because she happens to have a nightmare? It's too bad. Thank Heaven, Victoria will never hear anything about it. I've guarded against that."

His weighing-machine that night guaranteed a loss of several ounces. From one point of view this was satisfactory. It illustrated, as he observed, the power of mind over matter, and the effects of worry on the general physique.

. . . . .

Judith and Victoria spent a happy afternoon. Their conversation was interrupted at intervals by bursts of laughter that left them helpless and speechless.

"And to think, Judy," said Victoria, "that I nearly missed it altogether. I'd made up my mind to go at twelve o'clock, because that's the proper time for ghosts and hobgoblins. But I didn't wake till nearly two. I'd half a mind to chuck it until to-night, but then I thought I'd take my chance. It would have been better just at midnight, but I guessed it would scare her any time. So I slipped on my toggery and slithered down the tower stairs in my tennis shoes. She never said a word. Oh, that was all right—that was quite absolutely right! And there's a good five-shilling bottle of cod-liver oil at the bottom of the fish-pond."

"Her parting present to me," said Judith, "was a large tin of eupeptic tablets. I was to take one after every meal—or two if I had any feeling of constriction."

"What's that?"

"Blessed if I know."

"What have you done with them?"

"I gave a big handful of them to your old pony."

"What a pig you are, Judy! You oughtn't to have done that."

"That's all right. He wouldn't look at them. So I buried them all!"

"Do you know what I'm going to do?" asked Victoria. "I'm going to ask papa to give me the haunted room. It's much nicer than the room I've got. It's bigger, and it's got lots of cupboards, and it's panelled."

"He won't do it."



"Yes, he will. He doesn't believe in the witch business himself, and he'll always do anything I want unless he can argue that it's bad for me. The worst of it is that I'll have to tell him about this little spree of ours one of these days."

"I shouldn't. Why?"

"Don't know. I've got to tell the poor old dear everything that I can tell him. I can't tell him that I rode his hunter the other morning, because if I did he'd sack every man and boy in the stables. And it's not their fault, because I persuaded them. But I'll tell him about the Tenwood Witch; I shouldn't wonder if it amused him. I fancy he's not too keen about Aunt Alicia himself. Besides, it's Christmas time, and nobody can make much of a row about anything at Christmas time."

. . . . .

Victoria kept her word. She told her father the whole story. He said that she had been very wrong, and she must promise never to do it again. She promised at once. It was, he reminded her, the duty of children to show a proper respect for their aunts.

"Even if they give you pills?" suggested Victoria.

Besides, her father urged, these practical jokes were very dangerous. Victoria herself apparently had not got a nervous constitution, but Aunt Alicia had. It was entirely due to Victoria's wickedness that Aunt Alicia was not with them and sharing in the Christmas festivities.

At this point a slight spasm crossed over her father's face. The spasm became a smile, and the smile became a laugh.

It may be presumed that she was forgiven. For at 'present she occupies the haunted room, and at an impromptu fancy dress dance that Christmas she had considerable success as the Tenwood Witch.

## XXIV

### LOVERS ON AN ISLAND

#### I

“**H**OW sweet it would be,” said Isobel, “to remain here for ever in this lovely little island in the middle of the big, lonely lake, just you and I, Willy!”

“Table d’hôte at 7.30,” said William gloomily, “and we’ve got to get back for it. And then we shan’t get another moment alone together till after nine. And even then we shan’t unless we wander off into the garden together, and the last time we did that we were accused of selfishness. We’re all right, but I can’t make out what the rest of the world was made for.”

Truly it was an enchanting island, with tall trees where the herons built, and gray, moss-grown boulders where shy, rare lizards sunned themselves, and stretches of bracken. Here for a brief hour they had been quite out of the world. But it was five o’clock, and it would take them nearly two hours to get back to hateful civilization, and hateful civilization demanded them acidly and peremptorily.

“Listen,” said Isobel, “to the little wavelets talking nonsense all round the coast—making love to the silence. Oh, this fragment of pure, sequestered Nature—Nature as sweet as she always is when she is left to herself!”

"And we're going back," said William, "to that inferior pot-house masquerading as a first-class hotel under the guidance of an intelligent Swiss. Back to the sole that is really plaice, and to the *crème de volaille* with a quadrupedal origin, and to the lamb that is frozen, and the peas that are tinned. And at the next table will be the Reverend Father with the indigestion, and the mature lady with the conversation, and the satisfied American who tells us what he will do with this country when he has bought it."

"I don't like the people," said Isobel. "And mamma doesn't like them either. And the dinner isn't nearly as good as it looks and sounds. But all the same you think too much about food. You're too material."

"I'm particularly spiritual by nature," said William modestly. "But at dinner food is rather thrust on your attention, and I have an honest man's hatred of imitations. Otherwise my wants are few. A loaf of bread, a jug—or just the ordinary bottle—of wine, and thou beside me singing in the wilderness, and nobody need trouble about me further; in fact, I wouldn't insist on the bread. It's—— Good heavens!"

They had just come round the corner to the landing-stage, and in one flash of an eye William had realized that the boat in which he had rowed Isobel across to the island was no longer there.

"The boat's got away!" cried Isobel in anguish.

"So I was observing, and I'm afraid it's my fault. I can't make it out, for the knot that I tied can't slip or go wrong. The harder the boat pulled the tighter the knot would get. If there were—or had been—

anyone on the island besides ourselves, I should say that someone had been having a little game with us."

"Oh, Willy! I've remembered. Can you forgive me?"

"Not at present, because I've got nothing to forgive. But if you'll provide the material——"

"It was my fault—all my fault. It was while you were struggling with our fire to boil the kettle. I slipped back to the boat to get my parasol, and it was right at the other end of the boat; and I untied it to pull it round, and then I tied it up again, and I suppose that was it."

"That's all right," said William.

"But what will everybody think? And what will they do?"

"Well, with our customary secretiveness we never said where we were going. They know that we took the tea-basket and a rug." He had been carrying these, and he now put them down. "And that's all they know. We might be up one of the many noble mountains that give this desolate country its attraction for the tourist. We might be over at the ruined abbey. The lake is three miles away from the hotel, and may never occur to them at all. About half-past eight or nine they will begin search-partying, but they won't have the faintest idea where to search. If we had hired the boat, the man who let it could have been depended upon to rescue us. But this is Jefferson's private boat, which he gave me the use of, and I doubt very much if anybody saw us unlock the boat-house and get it out. If we'd been trying to steal the boat we should have had some of his men round us in no time. So, taking one consideration with another, we

shall certainly be rescued, but quite possibly it won't be till to-morrow morning."

"It's perfectly awful. But I'm quite sure someone will come for us long before that. Don't look so downhearted, Willy; it will only mean that your dear dinner will be put off for an hour or two. I don't mind it a bit. It's rather adventurous and romantic!"

"Yes, but there's just a chance that it will be beastly uncomfortable for you, if we have to stop here all night. That's what I don't like."

"We aren't going to stop here. Some other boat will come over."

"Bit late in the day for it."

"Well, something's certain to happen. It always does on desert islands. Now what ought we to do?"

"I'm told there are a lot of queer cross-currents in the lake, and it's quite possible our boat may have drifted in again. We'll just go round the island and look. Or I'll go alone, if you're tired."

"Not a bit. I'll go one way and you'll go the other, and we'll meet. Then we shall do it in half the time."

The entire circuit of the island could be made in twenty minutes, and they had in all probability many vacant hours before them. But there is a joy in saving time even when it is a very little time and you have no particular use for it. Old gentlemen of an obese habit will run to catch a train on the Underground when there is another in three minutes, and then there are inquests.

So William and Isobel encircled the island. But they found no trace whatever of their boat. Isobel said she had been quite sure from the start that that would never do.

"And now," she said, "I know what."

"Well. What is it?"

"We must try smoke-signals. They're often used by the natives, you know."

"Natives of where?"

"How should I know? Just plain natives you get in travel-books."

"I see," said William gravely. And then they set to work collecting bracken for the smoke-signal. One of Jefferson's gardeners was to see it, answer it, and start to the rescue at once. Of that Isobel felt quite sure. In the meantime, her word "travel-books" had started her on a train of thought as she gathered the bracken.

"Willy, dearest," she said suddenly, "we ought to have a barrel of pickled pork, very little injured by the sea-water. People always have that on desert islands."

"They do," said William. "It is washed up from the wreck. They've lost their parents in the wreck, but they don't think nearly so much about losing their parents as about finding that barrel. However, it's no good complaining. We've got no pickled pork and no sea-water to damage it with."

"We've got no wreck," said Isobel, "that's the initial mistake. When you're cast upon a desert island you have the wrecked vessel fixed firmly on the adjacent coral reef. That is so in the story-books, and it comes in very usefully, for that wreck does not stop at pickled pork. Anything you want, from a steam-crane to a toothpick, is washed out of the captain's cabin and delivered safely on the beach at your feet next morning."

"Yes, I know that wreck. It's a gratis Whiteley, with the tide as the vans."

"I don't know that I don't miss the patent desert island's animals even more. You know those animals? They're wild, but not so very wild. When George, or any of the desert-island family, gets hold of them, they become rapidly docile. George finds a hippopotamus and treats it kindly. Next day it is still a little shy; but by the end of the week George is driving it tandem in a curricule (washed up from the wreck, of course), with an iguana as leader."

"What's an iguana?"

"Haven't the faintest idea; but I'm pretty certain I've come across it in the desert-island stories. We've got nothing of the kind here. We haven't even got the deep, dark forest of eucalyptus and opodeldoc, with the monkeys swinging in it, all packed with bread-fruit, guava jelly, and ripe bananas. Oh, this is nothing of a desert island, and I don't care how soon we get out of it!"

"*Varia et mutabilis semper!* An hour ago you didn't care how long we stopped here."

"Yes," said Isobel; "but there's a difference between stopping because you want to stop and stopping because you can't get away. Here, we must have got enough bracken for our fire by now."

William struck a match. The dry fern blazed freely, and a column of smoke went up on the still air. But no answering signal came from the mainland, and gradually they realized that their fire had not been seen, or had not been understood. Isobel strained her eyes to see a boat being rowed towards them, but no boat came.

"This begins to be a nuisance," she said impatiently. "It's nearly seven, and I am simply faint with hunger and fatigue."



"What a fool I was to let you tire yourself with gathering that bracken," said William. "However, I'll bring up the rug and the tea-basket, and we must do the best we can. Very likely your smoke-signal was seen, and they're on the way to us by now."

"On the way to us? They'd have been here by this time. You said yourself we shouldn't get off before to-morrow, and I don't for a moment suppose we shall get off then. It gets frightfully cold at night too. Never mind; it can't be helped. It was silly of me to let you arrange things, that's all."

Decidedly, fatigue, hunger, and disappointment were doing deadly work with Isobel's temper.

## II

"LUCKILY," said William, as he unscrewed the stopper of the bottle, "when one goes on a tea-picnic, one always takes far too much milk. That milk will be very useful now. Milk is a food, you know; one doesn't starve when one has milk."

"Who says that milk is a food?"

"The doctors say so."

"Well, I say milk is not a food. Milk's a drink. You drink it; you don't eat it. How can it be a food?"

William—good-natured and pusillanimous—said that the doctors were very likely wrong; doctors often were.

"And there's only about a teacupful of it," said Isobel.

"I never touch milk myself, except in tea," lied

William. "It makes me ill. Lots of men are like that."

"I'm almost certain I've seen you drink it."

"Never. Unfortunately, we used all the tea at tea-time. In fact, we seem to have used everything. There are a few biscuits, and—ah! any amount of butter."

"How many biscuits will there be each?"

"Oh, I'm not going to spoil my dinner by eating anything now."

"There isn't going to be any dinner," said Isobel, in tones of the deepest melancholy.

"We shan't get it for two or three hours, perhaps, but I'm certain we shall get it ultimately. We'll get off this accursed island somehow. Cheer up, Isie!"

Isobel did her best to smile faintly. She let herself be persuaded into drinking all the milk and eating all the biscuits, and her conscience smote her. She was a very good girl, and as a rule her conscience had little to do; so on the rare occasions when her conscience did get to work, it did not always work in the most approved manner. Here, for instance, it urged her to prove that she was quite right.

"I'm quite sure," she said, "that you think I'm in a horribly bad temper, Willy."

William laughed. "Not a bit of it. Naturally, this isn't much fun for you."

"I wasn't thinking of myself," said Isobel, with, I fear, a touch of the Christian martyr in her voice. "I was thinking about poor mamma and the others. How terribly anxious they'll be! Have you thought of that?"

"Yes; but they won't have begun to be anxious yet. They won't begin to be really troubled before

nine. We've been late for dinner before sometimes, you know."

"Yes, and they've talked to us about it. And we promised that we would never be late again."

"Well, it's not really our fault this time."

"We know that, of course, and our own people will know it too, and believe it. But will the rest of the people in the hotel believe it, or will they believe we did it on purpose? It's horrible! It's compromising!"

"We've been engaged a year. We are to be married next month."

"That doesn't stop people's tongues."

"There are lots of ways of stopping people's tongues," said William darkly.

By this time Isobel had quite justified herself in her own mind and believed that she had a legitimate cause for grievance.

"It's really rather too bad," she said. "Naturally, I leave you to manage everything. One always leaves it to the man. Then you bring me to this horrible place, and then you go and lose the boat. And you don't seem to have the faintest idea what to do to get us away again. An emergency like this is a test, and you really don't come out of it very well. It destroys one's confidence. One doesn't feel that one can depend on you to get one through. You can only just stand there and talk."

This was severe on the island. It had been a "fragment of pure, sequestered nature"; it was now a "horrible place." It was severe on William, too, for after all it was Isobel, and not he, who had lost the boat; and if he did nothing, it was chiefly because

there was nothing to do. Isobel was on the verge of tears and at her consummate worst.

"I'm most awfully sorry," said William. "I know how trying it must be for you. I'll go and get the stuff together for another fire; it will show up better when it is dark."

"You can try it, of course," said Isobel resignedly.

### III

WILLIAM went, and at that moment his luck turned right round. At first he could hardly believe his eyes. There was the boat, brought back by the queer currents of the lake, drifting quietly along as if it had never done anything wrong in its life.

"Isie!" he called. "It's all right. Come along home."

She came running towards him. He pointed out the boat.

"Return of the wanderer," he said.

"Yes, but it's drifting away from us. And even now it's quite out of reach."

"I'm prepared to bet one hundred pounds to one hayseed that it is not out of my reach," said William. "Please hold my coat for a minute."

He waded the first part of the way and swam the rest, and he brought back the boat. As he stood on the shore, panting and wringing the water from his clothes as well as he could, Isobel's conscience smote her once more, and by this time it had got into thorough working order and smote hard and truly.

"Willy! You're soaked, and you'll simply catch your death of cold."

"Not I. Rowing will keep me warm. If you'll just catch hold here, I'll fetch the basket and rug."

When he came back he found her repeating with all the solemnity of a Litany: "I'm a beast. I am a pig. I won't forgive myself. I'll never, never, never forgive myself."

"Hul—lo!" he exclaimed. "What's all the trouble?"

"I'm ashamed of myself. I'm very sorry. You may give me up altogether if you like. It would only serve me right."

"Afraid I can't. Not got time, for one thing. Tumble in, sweetheart. All right? Off we go then."

As he pulled hard away from the island she continued: "It was simply splendid the way you brought that boat in. I never saw anything like it. It was magnificent. And to think that you did it all for the stupid, spiteful, cowardly she-cat that I am."

"I say, don't go on like that," said William, "or you'll make me laugh. And I can't laugh and pull at the same time. To think that I sneered at the intelligent Swiss who runs our hotel. Shan't I fly at his warmed-up garbages as soon as I get a chance!"

"I do wish you hadn't gone into the water like that."

"It won't do me any harm, and it will do us collectively good. It proves that we really did lose the boat."

"You're an angel!"

And luck having now decided to take the lovers in hand did the thing thoroughly well. They tucked the boat up in its little home by the edge of the lake, and took the path up into the main road; and they

had hardly reached the road before they heard behind them the sound of a quick-trotting horse.

"That's Vera!" exclaimed William. "Must be." The horse and cart swung round the corner into sight. "By Jove, it is! Hi, there! Tom!"

Vera was a fast mare belonging to the proprietor. William always maintained that the intelligent Swiss must have stolen her, on the grounds that the Swiss would never have bought so good an animal, and nobody would have been fool enough to give her to him.

The man pulled up, and William helped her up into the cart. "You'll be home in a quarter of an hour," he said.

"But aren't you coming too?"

"Too wet; I'll run for it. I shan't be long after you."

On his arrival he found that she had already established for him a serviceable reputation as a hero and a genius. As the utmost of his exploit was that he had swum a few yards in his clothes and recognized a horse, he felt that he had obtained the reputation at a very moderate cost.

The hotel dinner was over, but the intelligent Swiss, susceptible to the beauty of Isobel and the long purse of her father, did wonders. They dined well, under the admiring supervision of Isobel's family. The Swiss produced with an air of mystery a very special bottle. "No," he said to William, "zat is not on ze vine list. It is not filth, zat. I haf drunk him myself."

And Isobel explained to her mother that if you were in a railway collision, a colliery explosion, a shipwreck, and an earthquake simultaneously, you were quite all right so long as you had William with you.

"If I'd been with anybody else I should have been sitting on that darling little island without any dinner at this moment."

The length of the swim increased and multiplied exceedingly. By the end of dinner it was represented that William had swum half-way across the lake. She also proved that, but for William, there would have been no cart to take her swiftly home from the lake. I do not know how she did this, because the cart would have overtaken her in any case, and, even if she had not recognized the horse, the man Tom would certainly have recognized her, and pulled up. So I do not know how she did it; but she did it, and with such enthusiasm as to convince all who heard her, with the solitary exception of William himself. He protested frequently and firmly, until he found that he was merely earning another reputation for excessive modesty. Then he gave up.

But it was pleasant to sun himself in his lady's favor once more.

#### IV

LONG after Isobel had gone to bed William sat in the hotel smoking-room consuming many cigarettes and listening to the converse of an aged angler.

Now the angler was a cynic, which is not wonderful. While the angler is not catching fish—that is, for by far the greater part of the time that he is trying to catch them—he has leisure for meditation, and his meditations are likely to take a bitter tone. But I do not know why all cynics are extremely liable to say things about women; there seems to be no reason for it.

The aged angler's principal opponent was the dyspeptic clergyman whom William and Isobel had dignified by the name of the Reverend Father. But to-night the Reverend Father had gone to bed early in a state of harassing doubt as to whether it had been wise of him to take a second helping of ice pudding. Consequently, the aged angler had room to spread himself, and he talked on the subject of women.

"You will never find in any woman," he cried dictatorially, "a really perfect sense of truth and justice. Even the best of them have not got it. The best woman in the world will blame her husband for what is really rank bad luck and not his fault in the very least. If the train in which they are travelling breaks down, and she has a few hours to wait, she always feels and acts as if her husband was in some way responsible."

"But then," said William, "she also praises and loves her husband for his good luck, for which also he is not responsible. One injustice cancels the other, and they both go out, and so no harm's done."

"You really think like that?"

"Certainly."

"Then all I can say is that you have no proper sense of justice yourself."

"Very likely," said William. "And I'll bet you the want of it doesn't keep me awake at night. Good night, everybody."

"Of course," said the aged angler, when William had gone, "we have to take into account that he's very much engaged to be married. Poor chap!"



## XXV

### THE HERO AND THE BURGLAR

ON the ninth day of the honeymoon, being at the time in the presence of his wife, Mr. Herbert Fayle broke a bootlace. And that settled it. From that time forward, onward, and upward, through twenty years of happy married life, Mrs. Fayle entertained an immutable opinion of her husband's potential ferocity in direct contradiction to the facts. Her sister, who once ventured to suggest that Herbert was not so very terrible, was treated with superiority.

"You would naturally think so, Clara. That quiet manner of Herbert's is very deceptive. You see, you have never seen Herbert when he is roused. I have. I remember one occasion, quite early in our married life, when the storm broke." This was the occasion when the bootlace also broke. "I assure you I shall never, never forget it."

Mrs. Fayle used Herbert's potential ferocity to overawe her erring servants. This she did with singular persistence, perfect confidence, and no success whatever. "If," she would say to a careless housemaid, "Mr. Fayle had seen the way the drawing-room was dusted—or, rather, *not* dusted—this morning, I tremble to think what might have happened." The servants did not tremble. They knew better. Mrs. Fayle was away once for a month, and her husband

was left in the house. During that month the servants had the time of their lives. Mr. Fayle was vaguely conscious that he could never get any hot water, and that there were many horrid irregularities; but the only time—it was when dinner was an hour late—he had ventured to inquire why, he was told that the dog had got out. This satisfied Mr. Fayle thoroughly, and made him ashamed that he had spoken. The dog got out quite a good deal while Mrs. Fayle was away, and so did the servants; and if one of them—not the dog—missed the last train back, then why, as the cook observed, did those railway companies want to go altering their time-tables about?

The fact is that, in an international competition, Herbert Fayle would have been awarded first prize and champion gold cup for sheer meekness. But his wife's belief in her husband's brutally heroic qualities remained unshaken. The high opinion that so many women have of their husbands frequently has no basis in facts, but it is always touching, and sometimes useful.

Herbert Fayle lived a peaceful life in a quiescent suburb, and the heroic quality that is never required is never missed. But let us do Mr. Fayle justice. He did protest, with all the strength that congenital meekness would allow, against any excessive estimate of his militant character. "I'm a good-tempered man," he said. And he was. It was only after the incident in which Joshua Bidder was concerned that he gave up the struggle.

Joshua Bidder was a burglar, and a disgrace to his profession. He knew nothing, he could do nothing, he was intemperate, and he had nerves. He was unskilful and unfortunate; he had frequently been in

prison, and he never had anything to show for it. He was despised by his own fraternity. "The only time Bidder ever got anything," said one able and scientific crook, "was once when he broke into a place where they had the mumps." If a job of peculiar softness was to be described, it was said that Josh Bidder himself couldn't hardly miss it. Police-court missionaries had done their best with Bidder, and so had the Salvation Army, but nobody was more eager to get Joshua to stop it than the old-established burglars were. It was not merely that he brought the profession into contempt; his bungling often gave warning and spoiled a chance. "Look 'ere, Josh Bidder," said an elderly expert, at the present moment eligible for entertainment at the State's expense, "if ever I catches you tryin' anythink as I've a mind to touch myself, I'll just put your lights out! You turn your attention to sneakin' milk-cans on a foggy mornin'—that's all you're fit for!"

Failure and ignominy having driven him from the metropolis Mr. Bidder went to the suburbs. Here he hung about and peeped over walls, and attracted the notice and suspicion of the local police. His face alone was almost enough to justify arrest. Dogs would go two miles out of their way to bite Bidder, and do it cheerfully. The most credulous of maid-servants at the back door refused to believe his preposterous statement that he was a travelling photographer, and unchained the dachshund.

When Joshua Bidder decided that on the night of August 2 he would enter and ransack the residence of Herbert Fayle, it might have seemed to the careless observer that he had at last struck the line of least resistance. But a judicious burglar would have dis-

covered that the Fayles were leaving for their holiday on the following day, and that on the afternoon of August 2 their plate and jewels had been safely deposited in the strong-room of the local bank. And the judicious burglar does not crack empty nuts.

On the evening of August 2 Joshua was in a position of affluence which was unusual with him, having that morning succeeded in changing a bad half-crown. This being so, Joshua entered a public-house and took a light dinner, consisting of a quart of stout with sixpennyworth of gin in it. He felt that this gave him heart for the work before him. It cannot be necessary to add that the judicious burglar does not drink when he is on business, and does not provide evidence by entering public-houses. Briefly, he does very few of the things that Joshua did.

At eleven o'clock he entered the garden of the Fayles' residence. Standing with his flat feet on a Jacoby geranium he surveyed the house, and came to the conclusion that everybody was in bed and asleep. If he had walked round to the other side of the house he would have seen that one room on the first floor was still lit up; but Joshua was not a glutton for physical exertion, and he did not walk round. He pushed back the catch of the scullery window, removed his boots, opened the window, and entered. He should not have left his boots in the garden, but the table-knife procedure was quite correct. He struck a silent match, and by the light of it made his way into the dining-room. That fatal dining-room! Many a burglar far abler than Joshua has found in the dining-room the graveyard of his reputation.

Joshua now switched on the light. He noted with pleasure decanters, a siphon, and glasses. "Anybody

would think they were expectin' of me," he said to himself, as he poured out half a tumbler of whisky, and took a comfortable chair. He intended to take just that one drink and to come back for the rest after he had made his collection. But in five minutes he was fast asleep.

In his study upstairs, Mr. Herbert Fayle had heard nothing of Joshua's entrance. Fayle was a tidy man, and he was arranging and putting away his papers preparatory to his departure on the morrow. This being done, he felt thirsty, and decided to go down to the dining-room for a whisky-and-soda. Reprehensible conduct of this kind was very unusual with Mr. Fayle.

He noticed the light under the dining-room door, and made a mental memorandum to ask Mary to speak to the servants about their carelessness. Then he opened the door, and his heart sank within him. The sleeping Joshua was a horrifying and repulsive blackguard. Herbert Fayle decided that his right course would be to close the dining-room door as softly as possible, so as not to wake the burglar, and then to fetch one or more policemen. But at that moment Joshua suddenly awoke, realized Herbert Fayle, and staggered to his feet.

Joshua was not, speaking pedantically, sober. But he pulled himself together as well as he could and embarked hurriedly on a story which he believed to be plausible.

"Sorry, gov'nor," said Joshua. "My mistake entirely. I've been dinin' with a few genelmen friends—lil' gel's birthday—and lorst me way 'ome. What I expect is I put the wrong latch-key in my pocket

and the trine took me past my right station, and——”

Joshua stopped short. He had suddenly grasped an important fact—that the other man was much more frightened than he was. In two lurches he put himself between Mr. Fayle and the door, and changed his manner.

“Hand over your ticker and your cash, or I’ll cut your liver out!” said Joshua fiercely, producing his table-knife.

Mr. Fayle retreated, with one hand grasping his watch-pocket, and with fourpence and a bunch of keys jingling alluringly in his trousers’ pocket, took up a strong position behind the dining-room table, and said: “Now, steady now. Steady now. Steady now. Really now. Steady now.”

Joshua brandished his knife and overbalanced himself. He clutched at things in general, and brought the tray of whisky and glassware to the ground, with himself on the top of it. His uninviting face was cut considerably, and the noise was such that it woke the sleeping Pomeranian in its basket on the second-floor landing.

“Yap—yap—yap—yap—yap!” said the Pom. Its varied excursions had been useful to the servants, and now it was rendering splendid service to Mr. Fayle himself. The dog is the friend of man.

Joshua Bidder, picking himself up from the ruins, heard the dog and recognized the force of its argument. He had been bitten before, and now, in the presence of any dog, his backbone turned to water. He had just time for a little parting sarcasm as he made for the window.

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"So long, ole pal!" said Joshua. "Sorry I cawn't stop. Remember me to the missus."

He flung up the window and stepped out on to the drive. As he did so a large black thing jumped out of darkness and collared Joshua by the neck and the left wrist. And the bass voice of the large black policeman said: "'Ere, where do you think you're comin' to?"

"Fair cop," said Joshua humbly.

Inside the dining-room Mr. Herbert Fayle heard the comforting voice of the policeman, and saw in a flash that pursuit was now deprived of any attendant disadvantages. So he went in pursuit at once, and the way he came through that window with a poker clasped in one hand was perfectly glorious.

"It's all right, sir," the policeman called, as he clicked the handcuffs on Joshua's wrists. "It's all right; I've got him here." He flashed his bull's-eye over Joshua's lacerated visage. "My word, sir, but you've given him what for, and no mistake!"

"Bit of a rough and tumble," said Mr. Fayle complacently.

"Lucky for him I got him before you come up with that poker. You'd have done for him, sir."

"I've bin cruelly mis'andled," whined Joshua. "If there ain't one law for the rich and another for the paw, 'e should be made to awnswer for——"

"Hold your jaw!" said the policeman unfeelingly.

And then Mrs. Fayle and the dog arrived on the scene, the former in a dressing-gown, and both agitated. Mrs. Fayle clung to her husband, and the dog clung, by its teeth, to Joshua. The dog being removed, explanations followed.

Mrs. Fayle's account of the incident was based

partly on the policeman's account—Mr. Fayle gave him a sovereign afterwards, and I think the man had earned it—and partly on Joshua's account, and partly on feminine intuition. With a view to a possible mitigation of his sentence, Joshua continued to maintain that he had been grievously assaulted. Mrs. Fayle could get very little out of her husband, and he shirked questions, but that was quite easy to understand; these brave men are often so modest and reticent about what they have done.

"Fortunately," said Mrs. Fayle to her sister Clara, "the Dobsons' gardener saw the man as he entered, thought he seemed a very suspicious character, and just mentioned it to the next policeman he met. The policeman found the man's boots under the open scullery window, and lay in wait for him. And if he had not been there, Herbert would have killed that man—killed him!"

"Would he really?" said Clara.

"The policeman and the burglar both thought so, and they knew. Herbert makes light of it, but then that is his way. I must tell you, he entered the dining-room without a suspicion there was anything wrong, and there was that awful man crouching with a knife in his hand ready to spring on him. Herbert was unarmed, and, as you know, he is not a big man, not nearly as big as the burglar was. Without an instant's hesitation he picked up a heavy decanter and felled the man to the ground with it. Then there was a most awful struggle between them. At last the burglar managed to break away and got through the window. Herbert snatched up a poker and dashed after him. As I say, it is a mercy the policeman was there.



The people who have never seen Herbert when he is roused simply do not know him."

Herbert protests mildly that his wife exaggerates. But he would sooner wear the halo of the hero than give the exact version of what happened between him and Mr. Bidder.

# MORAL STORIES

## I

### APPRECIATION

ONCE upon a time—or even oftener—there was a Desert.

If you should ever want to make a desert, this is the best way. Take a thousand good square miles and spread thickly with sand; throw in two oases, a nice fresh mirage, a dead camel, and three live Arabs; and serve very hot.

But this particular Desert was not made. It came so. It had always been like that. But I am sorry to say that it had not got the three live Arabs. Its oases were rich; its mirage was in perfect working order; the sand was spread very thickly indeed; and the camel was just about as dead as any reasonable camel could expect to be; but there were no live Arabs. In fact, in the whole of that vast desert there was no living thing of any kind.

Don't begin to blame the Desert now. It knew perfectly well that it was defective, and felt it very deeply. A desert does not expect to be densely populated, but it wants some living things of some kind. A couple of jackals and a mosquito would have made this Desert quite happy. And it had done its very best to attract visitors. Here, for instance, is an

advertisement which it inserted in "Bills and Clauses," which I need hardly tell you is the principal political newspaper circulated among the birds:—

"TO VULTURES COMMENCING.—Before building elsewhere apply to Box 1460 at the office of this paper. Useful climate. Good water and large free camel. Sandstorms twice daily during the season. A fine sunset performs every evening."

Now if you read that carefully you will see that it was a very nicely worded advertisement. Of course, by useful climate it meant unhealthful climate. But neither a climate nor a sandstorm can kill a breakfast for a vulture unless there is something to kill. Also only one camel was mentioned. These were weak points, and I expect that the vultures noticed them, for not one single reply to its advertisement did the Desert get. I doubt if there is any bird that gets more real æsthetic enjoyment out of a good sunset than a vulture does; but if it gets no food it is the habit of the vulture to die, and when a vulture is dead its enjoyment of things becomes considerably lessened.

In desperation the Desert put another advertisement in "Under the Stripes," which, as you are probably aware, is the leading society journal read by tigers. And this next advertisement I cannot defend at all; it was deliberately untruthful; it makes it impossible to be sorry for the Desert for what happened afterwards. It ran as follows:—

"TO MAN-EATERS.—Oases to let in a salubrious desert. Nice position. Well-stocked caravans pass the door weekly. Good living for an energetic couple. Magnificent sunsets night and morning."

This was all very wrong. The desert was not salubrious; no caravan ever came near it; and though the sunset was magnificent it was engaged for evening performances exclusively. A tiger will always walk twenty miles to see a really enjoyable sunset, and one came to the Desert to investigate. He arrived in the morning, and asked to see the Sunset. The Desert said it was just over. Then he asked to see the tracks of the caravans, and the Desert explained that this kind of caravan didn't leave any tracks. The Desert showed the tiger into the best oasis in the place, but he grumbled and said he couldn't eat cold camel, and the whole thing was a swindle, and he should have his money back. He left at once.

And that very day the Sunset turned sulky. He said he was absolutely dead sick of giving performances to empty houses. "What I should like," he said, "would be a few artists, sitting round on camp-stools. Other sunsets get it."

"Oh, but not in a place like this," said the Desert. "We haven't the facilities."

"Seems to me you haven't got anything except sand. I've known sunsets that hadn't got a color scheme that I wouldn't have been ashamed of, and yet they've got into the Academy. Last night I brought out an arrangement in crimson and purple, lovely enough to make a company promoter weep, and it was absolutely wasted. It takes all the heart out of one's work. I shall give it up."

"Pray don't say that," said the Desert excitedly, well knowing that the Sunset was its only attraction. "You may not be able to get a range of hills to work on, such as we provide, if you go elsewhere. And without a nice low range of hills you can't get your

effects properly. You see, the artists may come yet. You're doing very well, and they're bound to hear of you sooner or later. It wouldn't surprise me if in a month or two's time all this sand here was simply crawling with artists."

"Wouldn't it?" said the Sunset sardonically. "Well, it would surprise me. However, I won't make a point of artists, but I do say that I must have an audience of some kind. If I could have a dozen intelligent vultures and a few tigers of taste I wouldn't leave you."

"There was a tiger here only this morning."

"Then why didn't you keep him? You know that I never give matinées. Now listen to me. I've something specially fine for to-night. It's an opal and gold and gray, with quick changes. It's quite the finest thing I've ever done. It ought to last for about an hour. If you can't find some living thing to see it—and love it—and nearly cry over it, you'll get no more performances out of me. That's definite and final."

And that night the Desert was illumined with the finest sunset that there has ever been since the world began. But no eye saw it, and all its gentle miracles of beauty were like a lovely voice singing in an empty house.

Next day there was no sunset, and in its despair the Desert gave up being a desert altogether. The sand was sold by auction to different seaside resorts to make beaches with. And I don't know what became of the dead camel and the other things. But the Desert had to begin life all over again as a corkscrew, and how it became a corkscrew it would take too long to tell here. Besides, I can imagine that you are already impatient to get to the moral.

And this moral you shall remember whenever you read a book, or look at a picture, or listen to music. It is this: "Without appreciation there is no performance." Or, if you would like it put differently: In the genesis of a work of art, its creator is its father, but it has many mothers—those that understand it; and without them it could not exist. It is quite true that you have helped to make every story, every music, and every picture that you have liked intensely; but you will never get paid for it.



## II

### THE PHILOSOPHER

THERE was once a man who obtained at an early age the reputation of a philosopher. He had an impressive way of telling people that things were not what they seemed, and of proving that any conclusion at which they had naturally arrived must *ipso facto* be wrong.

One summer's day as he strolled through the fields he found a maiden stretched in the shade of the trees, face downward, weeping bitterly.

"Maiden," he said, "tell me why you weep. For I am a philosopher, and haply I may be able to administer to you words of salutary consolation."

At this the maiden sat up and showed her face. And, behold, her face was as plain as a motor omnibus; and with much emotion the end of her snowy nose had become rosy and phosphorescent.

"Oh, sir," said the maiden, "I weep because the gods have given everything to my sister Lesbia—and to me nothing at all."

Then the philosopher sat down beside her. "Let us first see," he said, "if the facts are as you state them. For it happens not infrequently that things are not what they seem. What is it then that the gods have given to your sister and not to you?"

"Beauty," said the girl, "and beauty is everything. Lesbia is the loveliest creature in the world. Her

chestnut hair is so long, so profuse, so delightful in its waves, that she gains an honorable subsistence by exhibiting it in a shop-window as an advertisement for a hair tonic. Her eyes are gray and long-lashed, and heavenly. She is a little pale, but it becomes her; and her fragrant lips are scarlet."

"Dear me," said the philosopher. "But it happens at times that with the beautiful face there goes an uncomely figure."

"It is not so with Lesbia. Every curve of her body is a poem. She is full of grace. Artists rave about her. And I—alas, I have no beauty of any kind." And once more the maiden fell a-weeping.

"Stop that," said the philosopher sternly; "you weep without reason; would you rather have a gift that you can keep or a gift that is taken from you?"

"Certainly, a gift that I can keep. Who would not?"

"Very well, then. The gift of the gods to your sister is illusory. It is no gift, for it will be taken away again. The years will rob her of her beauty. Old age will wither and twist and bend her body. Now then, can you make the *omelette aux fines herbes*?"

"I can," said the girl; but with no pride in it.

"In forty years you will still be able to make the *omelette aux fines herbes*. That is a gift which brings comfort, and, in consequence, gratitude and popularity; and it does not fade. Are you, perhaps, fonder of reading than your sister is?"

"Lesbia does not care for it. I, on the other hand, have a library subscription at the cash chemist's."

"There you are," said the philosopher triumphantly, "you are in commune with the greatest minds of all



ages. You have the power of culture. It is undying, it is the finest solace. Now, with regard to the sewing-machine."

"I've got one, and use it—Lesbia won't touch it."

"More and more your gifts are being revealed, and they are all of the precious character—far better than your sister's fleeting and worthless beauty. Never say again that the gods have neglected you. Weep no more. You have all for which a wise man looks in the partner of his life."

And then the philosopher saluted and left her; and the girl rose to her feet and began to feel more pleased with herself.

But presently she was conscious that the philosopher had turned back towards her with a notebook open in his hands.

"Beg pardon," he said, a little sheepishly, "but what did you say was your sister's address?"

### III

#### THE LIFE OF A BUBBLE

THE small girl came out of the house with a well-founded idea that the people inside did not particularly want her. She had also with her a bowl of soapsuds and a pipe wherewith to blow bubbles. For solitude must have its solace. She was plain, but obedient; good, but gooseberry-eyed. She found a clear ring in the middle of the orchard; the grass grew long there; the sense of remoteness was in the air. It was desperately wild and fine. There she sat down and began bubble-blowing. The first two attempts failed. The third was magnificent. She gave a little shake to the pipe, and the beautiful iridescent globe mounted slowly in the perfectly still air.

"That," said the small girl, "is a ripper."

. . . . .

The point of view of the human being who regards the bubble and the point of view of the bubble as it regards the human being present certain well-defined differences in matters of detail.

"I have been since the beginning of the universe," said the bubble to itself. "I exist now, I shall exist for ever. This present experience comes back to me as something imperfectly remembered from very long ago. It is unpleasant. To be so near a material earth, nearer, perhaps, than I have ever been before, is a kind

of contamination. It seems to throw a film of corruption over one. Luckily the feeling passes. The material earth sinks slowly back into the abyss from which it has risen, while I remain stationary and permanent."

The gooseberry eyes of the plain little girl watched the bubble very intently. How slowly it rose! Would it clear that branch? Oh, for a breath of wind to toss it high up, that it might sail far away out of her sight and that she might not witness its breaking!

"Yes," said the bubble, "it is so. I observe even now that my unpleasant environment is fading away from me. The girl with the gooseberry eyes, and the indifferent cracked bowl of an advertised soap, and the vast masses of uninteresting green leaves, are sinking slowly back into their abyss. Material influences begin to lose their hold upon me. I am now almost as fine and spiritual as I have ever been. The only thing that really troubles me is that I cannot probe the mystery. Have small, plain girls a use in being? Is there any purpose or design about those vast masses of green leaves? Is soap, however advertised and however perfumed, part of any great scheme tending ultimately to the help and the progress of myself or of my brothers?"

The plain girl listened intently. She thought she heard a voice. She would have obeyed the call, for she would have obeyed anything. She had been brought up to it. She had a dim and rather dismal conviction that, when she went in, it was necessary to send her out again; but that if, of her own volition, she went out, it then became necessary to fetch her in. These were things beyond argument, things that belonged to the great powers, that is to say, to the peo-

ple in the house. But she had heard nothing; it was a mistake; she was not to be fetched in just yet. So she could go on watching.

The smoke from the chimneys came sluggishly up through the oily air under a hot leaden sky. The bubble was far away, just above the smoke, not yet out of sight.

"Yes," said the bubble, "I do feel distinctly better. That nauseating sense of grossness which was caused by proximity to material things is completely passing away. But ought one to be nauseated? Would not one be happier if one could believe that such things did not exist at all, that they were merely subjective—the bad dreams to which a bubble may now and then be liable? In any case they pass as a dream. An all-merciful destiny that designed the universe for the use of bubbles arranged that all right."

. . . . .

The burning sun of noon stole out from the leaden clouds. Its glory fell full upon the bubble. A drop or two of soapy water flicked the tail of a sparrow flying below it.

"It's burst!" cried the girl, in a sad ecstasy.

A voice came from the outer and more civilized portion of the orchard.

"Where are you, Miss Jane? You come in this minute! Always where you oughtn't to be, aren't you?"

The girl who was always where she ought not to be went in that minute.

In the meantime the bubble took an entirely different view of the situation. The poor thing had not the remotest idea that it had burst.

“Yes,” it said, “it’s quite all over now. I am perfectly myself again, back in the calm, distant ether which suits me best. More than ever I incline to the happy view. The things that troubled me, the girl and the soap and the trees, were nothing but an imagining.”

## IV

### FOR VALUE RECEIVED

CUSTOM had overcome natural antipathies, and all three rested in peace on the hearthrug—the bull-terrier, the smoke-gray cat, and the mean-eyed guinea-pig.

“That’s my tail you’re sitting on,” said the cat, rather sharply.

“Sorry,” said the bull-terrier, and edged away a little. The guinea-pig gave one quick furtive look at both of them and then shut his eyes.

“Yes,” said the smoke-gray cat, “I need rest. I’ve been petted all the morning. You can have no notion what it is to be loved as much as I am.”

“Really,” said the bull-terrier. “Well, I don’t know about that. Of course, you are very much admired for your soft fluff and your graceful attitudes, but admiration is not love. One cannot get love that way.”

“How do you get it, then?” asked the cat, a little spitefully. “I suppose you do get it, from the way you talk.”

“Love,” said the bull-terrier, “is the reward of the more solid qualities. Let us suppose, for instance, that a young and beautiful girl goes out for a walk by herself in a lonely country. If she is accompanied by a dog of a good fighting breed she feels absolutely safe. Therefore she gets to love that dog. She must

do it. It is logically inevitable. And that kind of love lasts when the love of mere beauty fades."

"You believe all that?" asked the cat.

"It certainly ought to be so," said the bull-terrier. "But if I am to be frank, I do not think that our mistress loves me the best."

"Now you're talking sense," said the cat.

"Nor does she love you the best," added the bull-terrier.

"I must admit," said the cat, "that it has sometimes crossed my mind that she loves George the best."

George was the guinea-pig. He was plain, even for a guinea-pig. He was not well-connected, and his moral standard was very low.

"That is so," said the bull-terrier sorrowfully. "Just wake him up and ask him how he does it."

The cat gave George a pat on the head. His mean and vicious eyes opened quickly. He told her to be more careful where she put her feet.

"Look here," said the cat. "What do you do to make our mistress love you better than she loves either of us?"

"I am," said George.

"Yes. You are what?"

"Nothing. I merely am. It is enough."

"You have neither beauty nor grace," said the cat.

"You have neither strength nor courage," said the dog.

"But I am," said the guinea-pig. "That's all that's necessary."

Their mistress entered the room.

She picked up the guinea-pig and kissed him. Then she gently moved the cat and the dog so that George might lie nearer the fire.

There was a moment's silence when she had left the room.

Then a sound came from the guinea-pig which might well have been a chuckle or might have been a snore.

The cat went fast asleep out of sheer disgust.

The dog sat up and stared into the fire with great solemnity, and blinked and thought. He then made the following observation :

"The highest price that is paid is never by any chance for value received."



## V

### OMNIA VANITAS

"WITH your kind permission," said the Minstrel, "I will now introduce to your notice my celebrated apologue on the vanity of human wishes."

"Surely," said the Princess, "I have seen or read something of the kind before."

"Hush!" said the Minstrel. "The least little interruption is enough to put me out. The sensitiveness of a great artist is finer than anything you can imagine. What would you say if I were to be unable to proceed with that apologue?"

"I should forgive you," said the Princess simply.

"I will render forgiveness harder by proceeding with my story. There was once——"

"About what date?" asked the Princess.

"In the days of old," said the Minstrel firmly.

"As usual," said the Princess, and a slight shade of disdain crossed her lovely face.

"We shall never get on if we stop to talk about every little detail like this. There was once in the days of old, as I have already told you, a man who could have everything that he wanted."

"Do let me go on," said the Princess. "And after he had got everything that he wanted he found that he did not want it at all. So he ended up just as he had begun before he started on the gratification of his wishes. And the moral of this is, that all little boys

and girls should be content with that station of life into which it hath——”

“Wrong,” said the Minstrel. “Wrong all through. In any case, am I telling the story to you, or are you telling the story to me?”

“A little of each,” said the Princess.

“And that,” said the Minstrel, “is one of the things that I particularly dislike. I will be a performer if I may. I will be an audience if I must. But I will not be both at the same time. With these few words of preface I will now proceed to tell you that there was once in the days of old——”

“That’s the third time,” said the Princess.

“There was once in the days of old,” the Minstrel repeated firmly, “a man who could have everything that he wanted. At first he did not know that he could have everything he wanted, and so he became an actor. It was not good, but it might have been worse.”

“He might have been a minstrel,” suggested the Princess.

“Quite true. It might have been worse, or, as you say, it might have been better. As it was he was an actor—just a medium mummer with a blue chin and a high opinion of himself, but with no idea of the good fortune that was awaiting him. One day when he was being congratulated by his friends on his masterly creation of the part of the second footman in the new drama entitled ‘The Wickedest Woman in the Cab Radius,’ he shrank modestly from the compliments and said he would sooner have won the Battle of Waterloo than have played Hamlet at an almost first-rate suburban theater. This was the first intimation that he received of his marvellous destiny. The very next day he did win the Battle of Waterloo.”

"Come now," said the Princess, "come now; you would like to lie down for a little and rest, then perhaps you will be able to think of something which is more in accord with ascertained facts."

"Did I say that this was an apologue or did I not? Is an apologue supposed to be a bald record of facts or is it rather a suitable field in which the fancy may soar?"

"You can't soar in a field," said the Princess. "You can get buried in one. Try it. No; go on with the story."

"Very well," said the Minstrel. "There was once in the days of old——"

"Stop!" said the Princess, now justly infuriated. "Go on from the point where you left off."

"Very well," said the Minstrel gloomily. "This man who won the Battle of Waterloo was not for long satisfied with that achievement. He enjoyed it thoroughly, but he felt that more might be possible. One day he read Gray's 'Elegy,' and having looked round to be sure that the shorthand reporter was present, he took a nice attitude and said that he would sooner have written that poem than have won the Battle of Waterloo. The very next day he found that he had written Gray's 'Elegy.'"

The Princess groaned. She said faintly that it was of no use talking.

"I pointed that out some time ago," said the Minstrel severely. "The man enjoyed being a great poet very much, but he thought of other things which he would also like to be, and he was them. He thought of things that he would like to have, and he had them. The gratification of his wishes never annoyed him at

all. He never prayed that he might go back again to his simple cottage and his work on the farm."

"You said he was an actor," snapped the Princess.

"I did. I also said it was an apologue. That's the beauty of an apologue. This man who wrote Gray's 'Elegy' was fully satisfied with the fact that he had got everything he wanted until he suddenly realized that he had reached the end of his abilities and he could think of nothing else to want. That was terrible."

"What do you want me to do about it?" asked the Princess sweetly.

"Nothing," said the Minstrel. "It's too late to do anything. The man cut his throat and went mad."

"You got that in the wrong order."

"No, I haven't. He didn't cut his throat enough; that's what made him mad. It might have happened to anybody. He is now in an asylum. And the moral of it is that we should always want something."

"I'm glad I never knew that man," said the Princess.

"Madame," said the Minstrel, "had he known you he would have still had a want unsupplied."

## VI

### THE LOVE PHILTER

ONCE, in a remote time and place, the materials of the usual novel presented themselves. A man had fallen in love with a woman and the woman had not in the least fallen in love with the man. So when he, looking particularly handsome, pleaded his cause with her, she said "No."

Then the young man communed with himself. He had read in the learned books that women are by nature coy, and that their "no" not infrequently meant "yes." So he waited three months, then again entreated, and again she refused.

Further meditation showed him that it was absolutely essential that he should marry this woman. It was impossible to live without her. If the gods gave him all else and denied him that, then there would be no pleasure in any of their gifts. This being so, he thought of ways and methods by which a woman might be attracted. The first that he tried was brilliance and martial achievements. At that remote period there was always a war handy for those who wished to distinguish themselves in this way, and the man went into the war. After long waiting he got his opportunity and came out of it unscathed, and with a magnificent record for courage and skill and endurance. Adorned with the equivalent of the Victoria Cross prevalent at

that time, he returned to the house of his lady-love, and she would not see him.

He was equally unsuccessful when he held out to her the allurements of power. All his wealth and all his long trains of slaves impressed her not at all. He bored her very badly.

Then in despair, and no longer trusting to his own resources, he determined to take counsel of a wise woman that lived seven days' journey away. He went on his pilgrimage on foot, and because he could not sleep nor weary himself he made the journey in four days. The wise woman was old and gray, and sat huddled up in an untidy parcel. When she saw him approaching she stretched out a lean hand.

"I know," she said, "for what you have come. You desire the lady of your love."

"Yes," he answered, "I desire that and nothing else. I desire that at any price. What would you have me do, what would you have me give you?"

Then he showed her the equivalent of his bank-book prevalent at that time, and she went over it with care. But she said that she would take everything, all that he had; all his treasure, all his slaves, and in return she would give him a love philter. Then he most cheerfully made over to her, by the equivalent of a deed of gift prevalent at that time, the whole of his possessions, and she placed in his hands a cup of green jade containing a liquid that was as clear as water, and that shone in the dark as though it had been fire.

"See," she said, "that the lady of your love drinks of this. Then will she love you; you only; you, with her whole heart, you for ever."

Then he began his journey home again. And by this time he was fain to sleep, and weary in all his

limbs. But for his great longing to win the love of the woman he still went on by night and day. And as he travelled by night the liquid in the green jade cup gave him light to guide his footsteps. But at the last sleep would no longer be denied. He stretched himself on the sand a whole hour, with the cup of green jade standing at his head. And as he slept the only person that ever came into his dreams came into them once more—the woman whom he loved. And in the dream she said to him, "You are coming to see me."

He answered, "Yes. And now at last have I the means to overcome your hatred to me, and to turn it into such love as I myself have for you and ever shall have."

She then said:

"You have been to the wise woman, and you have bought from her a love philter that she alone can make."

"Yes," he said. "For the liquid gleaming like fire in its cup I have given all my possessions. Do you doubt its power?"

"No," she answered, "I doubt it not. If I drink thereof I shall love you for ever, only it will not be I, and it will not be you."

"I do not understand," he said.

"If I love you not now and love you after I have drunk of this cup, then it is because the philter and not you has made the change in me. It is a trick, a poor deception by which you will try to fool yourself and me."

"Then," he said, "better this unhappiness than that happiness." And poured the philter into the sand.

And when he awoke the cup was indeed overturned, and the thirsty sand had drunk the precious liquid to

the last drop. So having no longer any hope he went back on his way home.

And as he approached the house where the woman whom he loved lived, she came down the steps towards him, holding out both her hands.

"I watched for you from the window," she said. "A few nights ago I dreamed of you, a strange dream. You lay on the sands asleep. I have watched ever since."



## VII

### DOING GOOD

IT was a frosty but dull morning. The fields were shrouded in mist, and the garden looked dead and desolate. There was not a breath of wind, not a leaf that danced, not a bough that swayed.

Suddenly there was a rattling and whirring in the ivy that half covered the house, and a dozen sparrows flew out, knowing that it was about time for breakfast. They separated, and sat on different trees that commanded a view of the windows, and kept a look-out. From time to time they shifted their positions impatiently, but they did nothing practical to accelerate that breakfast. They left that to a bird with more initiative—a bird with a beak and a red breast.

The robin came with a dactylic flight down on to the Duke of Connaught immediately in front of the French windows of the dining-room, where he could be easily seen by those within. He chose a spray which would bend gracefully beneath his weight, and turned his red waistcoat to the window. He looked a perfect Christmas-card on that standard rose, and he knew from experience that this was effective. The trick answered once more.

A white-haired, genial old gentleman opened the windows and came out. He had a Crown Derby plate in his hands, and the plate was piled high with crumbs; he scattered the crumbs down the gravel walk, and as

he did so he said, "Chirrup." He said it several times, and the birds treated it with the contempt it deserved.

An old lady looked out of the window and said in a fat and warning voice, "Your hat, Charles." And the old gentleman, reminded that he had nothing on his head, went back into the house again.

Then the birds began on the crumbs. The robin came first; he had no more occasion to make play with his red breast; it was his other weapon, his beak, that came in useful now. He took a crumb and pecked a sparrow alternately with great regularity. But he was outnumbered, and, finding the general feeling of the meeting was against him, retired with the biggest crumb. After all, it was better to follow the gardener about and keep near the potting-shed during the dinner-hour; gardeners understood the tastes of robins, and did not restrict them to bread. How would the old gentleman have liked it if he had nothing but bread given him for his breakfast?

The sparrows were quite contented. They came in from all directions; they flew fearlessly to the crumbs; they hopped cautiously to them, jerking down the garden path with a light run and a quick stop. There were plump sparrows that had been here, bless you, longer than they would care to say, and had had crumbs all the time; there were ragged vagabond sparrows that had dropped in out of nowhere, swearing that they hadn't tasted food for a fortnight. They thieved without shame, and were robbed without resentment. One sparrow would select a morsel of bread, and hop off with it. The moment he put it down to get to work on it, another sparrow who had followed him would snatch it up. "Got him again," the thief remarked, with satisfaction. "Plenty more

where that came from," replied the philosopher, as he hopped back to the heap of crumbs again. In and out among the brown sparrows went what would have been called in Kensington shops "a pretty little article in art shades." It was a little tomtit, with his cap on, making no secret of the fact that he and the peacock both get their clothes from the same place. Far down the path a fat and timid thrush watched the intrepid and remunerative work of the little birds with plaintive wonder.

The old gentleman surveyed the scene from the window for a moment, smiling with pleasure; for he found pleasure in doing good even in the humblest of ways. And at the same time the cat stepped out of the back-kitchen into the garden.

He was a big cat, white splashed with black, a mighty hunter, and a most notorious evil-liver. Better to him the mouse or bird that he himself had killed than the cream and chicken of insipid domesticity. He told himself that this weather was the very devil. But for the crumbs and their consequences there would be nothing doing. He preferred the summer, when there were so many young birds and so much cover. He had meant to go to the front lawn and the adjoining paths to see what sport could be got there, and, therefore, being a cat, he started off in the opposite direction towards the kitchen-garden. That is part of the cat strategy. He ambled patiently and humbly along as if he had been a tame pony drawing a load of hymn-books to oblige a missionary. He paused to look into an empty frame and found nothing there, which was just what he had expected, and then turned his attention to business. In two minutes he was on the front lawn; but the birds did not see him because

he had hidden himself where the lowest boughs of the big cedar touched the grass. Three noiseless hops brought the cat in a flash to the box-edging of the path where the birds were feeding. He pressed himself close to it, and lay motionless but for the extreme tip of his tail, which was rather excited. Then slowly he began oiling and slithering up towards the birds. Not one hair of his sinful body moved. He made one spring, and he had sparrow for dinner.

When you wish to do good, you should first shut up the cat.

## VIII

### KIND WORDS

"KIND words," said the Aunt, "are worth far more than gold. They give more real pleasure; they do more real good. Try to remember that, Margaret Ursula."

Margaret Ursula said she would. She was a good girl, and always tried to do what she was told.

She thought about the power and value of kind words while she was undressing that night, and while she was saying her prayers, and while she was falling asleep. And that, perhaps, is why she had the following extraordinary dream. I tell it as it seemed to her.

Margaret Ursula was going down the sunny High Street of a quiet, provincial town that she knew well. She was conscious that she was very hungry, and that she was interested in what she saw—notably in a cart laden with golden sovereigns and drawn by many horses.

The jolting of the cart jerked some of the sovereigns into the gutter. No passer-by took the least notice. Margaret Ursula ran after the cart and called loudly to the driver to stop. He pulled up and stared sullenly.

"You've dropped some of your sovereigns," she said. "Run quickly back and get them. I'll hold your horses for you."

"Idiot!" said the man. "Interfering, fat-headed idiot!"

"Really," said Margaret Ursula, much shocked, "that is not a very kind or polite way to speak to a girl who——"

"Don't come begging here," said the man sharply. "I've got nothing to give you."

She looked amazed.

"And don't stand gaping like a dying fish. Anybody, to hear you talk, would think we lived in the days when this rubbish I'm carting away was worth something—the days before people really knew the value of kind words."

So that was it; the world had moved on; compliments and expressions of sympathy had taken the place of coinage.

That did not seem to her to matter much; it came as a thing that she might have expected. What did matter was that feeling of hunger—she was amazingly hungry. She turned from the sullen driver and walked quickly on, looking into the shops as she went. Suddenly she stopped. A faint smell of new bread and chocolate floated out through an open shop-door. In the windows were displayed all manner of delightful things to eat. It seemed to her the most glorious and noble confectioner's shop she had ever seen. It was a bad thing, she knew, to enter a confectioner's shop one hour before luncheon. But this was such a wonderful shop, and she was so remarkably hungry, that she was tempted to enter.

"Wipe your feet, you slut, can't you?" screamed the lady behind the counter—a pretty lady, too, and very nicely dressed, but with an angry face. It struck her

now that everybody she had met that morning had looked cross and severe.

She wiped her feet obediently, and said, "My shoes aren't half as dirty as your horrible mat."

Margaret Ursula had always been a polite girl, but now she had an overpowering conviction that politeness was extravagance.

"Shut up!" shouted the lady behind the counter.

Margaret took a large cake and began to eat it. It was pink sugar on the top and chocolate at the bottom, there was cream in the middle, and the rest of it was hot strawberry jam. It was just about the best cake she had ever eaten, but it made her a little thirsty.

"Lemonade," she said sharply.

The lady behind the counter gave her the lemonade, and at the same time observed that there were some people she disliked on sight. Margaret Ursula drank the lemonade, which was delicious, and carefully refrained from saying "Thank you." Now that any polite form of words, intended to give pleasure, had a purchasing value, one was careful not to use them unnecessarily. The time had now come for Margaret to pay for her refreshments; she turned to the lady behind the counter and said:

"I wonder if you would mind my telling you what perfectly beautiful eyes you've got; I shall never forget them."

"Go on," said the lady behind the counter.

"And there's something in your face that makes me think that at some time you must have gone through a great tragedy." Margaret Ursula knew that almost all women liked to be told that. It seemed to her that these two astounding compliments were sufficient payment, and she turned to go.

"Come back, you swindler!" shrieked the lady. "You've not paid for your lemonade."

"Dear me! What delightful lemonade it was, too! I think this is the very nicest shop I was ever in. I do hope you will make a great fortune in it."

"Thank you," said the lady, and gave one short smile. Margaret realized that she had paid rather too much for the lemonade, and that the thanks and the smile were the change. "And now," the lady continued, "for goodness' sake get out of my sight!"

Margaret Ursula left the shop and entered a hansom. The horse immediately began to kick furiously.

His hoofs went *rap, rap, rap*. "Come in," said Margaret Ursula, rubbing her eyes and yawning.

And the maid came in and drew back the blinds a little; and Margaret Ursula was awake again.

. . . . .

"I suppose," said Margaret Ursula at breakfast, "that it is quite true that kind words are worth more than gold."

"Far more," said the Aunt.

"It's just as well," said Margaret Ursula meditatively, "that most people don't know that."

"But why?"

"Well, nobody would ever say anything nice to you."

"Occasionally," said the Aunt severely, "you say things that surprise me, Margaret Ursula."



## IX

### THE WORTHLESS STONES

THE two men who had been eagerly studying the lists of situations vacant in the newspapers of the free reading-room came out dejected. They wore frock-coats and silk hats and patent-leather boots, all in the last stage of decay.

"May as well go and sit in the park," suggested the elder.

"It's as good as anything else—or as bad," assented the younger.

"I'll tell you what it is, Smithson," said the old man, as he took his seat in the sun and gazed reflectively into the interior of his silk hat. "We ought to have seen this coming. We ought to have been prepared for it. We ought to have had something else up our sleeve."

"As it is," said the younger man, "we are absolutely at the end of everything. I haven't got a penny in my pockets. I suppose you haven't either, Marks?"

"No," said Marks. "I've got a paper of Brazilian diamonds of the first water and I've got a nice little lot of pigeon's-blood rubies. A year ago I could have got about fourteen thousand for them; to-day if I offered them in exchange for a penny loaf the man would laugh at me. Yes, Smithson, we ought to have seen this coming."

"I don't know about that," said Smithson. "No-

body else saw it. Why should they? Ever since the beginning of the world precious stones, as they used to be called, had been held in high esteem. It was so in all nations and all ages. What reason had we to expect this sudden change of fashion, this sudden awakening to the facts, if you like to put it that way?"

"Because," said Marks, "we might have argued it out. We might have said to ourselves that the game had been good for a very long time and that was all the more reason why it should not last much longer. If we had just put to ourselves the plain question, Why are precious stones precious? we should have made provision for the bursting of the bubble. They were only precious because a lot of fools, principally women, chose to think they were. It was purely arbitrary. There was nothing else in it at all. As civilization went on people were bound to wake up to the fact. When one recalls that not so many years ago any amount of capital and labor was being expended in South Africa and elsewhere in order to get some brilliant rubbish out of the ground for women to stick in their hair or to put round their necks, why it simply seems like a mad dream. It's much more wonderful that the humbug lasted so long than that it stopped when it did."

Smithson drew from his waistcoat pocket three or four beautiful pearls, spread them on the palm of his hand, and looked at them.

"I still think, you know," he said, "that there's a kind of charm about these things. Of course, I know that they're no longer worth anything, but still I've got a liking for them."

"Simply a remnant of your old prejudice," said Marks. "The glass-workers turn out much prettier

things. They get more variety of color and of pattern. All the endless worry with banks and safes is done away with. If a woman loses a few of her beads she can easily go to the nearest shop and buy another sixpennyworth. If in the old days she had lost a few pearls like those that you have in your hand there would have been no end of a hullabaloo. Columns and columns in the paper about it. It was not to my interests, of course, that this change should come. It has ruined men like you and me. But it has done a lot of good as well. Think of the amount of crime there used to be. Heaps of burglars in London not so long ago would have risked their freedom for the rest of their lives, and perhaps their necks as well, to have stolen the rubies that I have got in my inside pocket. Women were bought and sold for those toys. Nations kept vast amounts of capital locked up and unproductive in the form of crown jewels. It was a rotten system, and on the whole it's a good thing that we've done with it. All I say is, we ought to have seen the end was coming."

"Look here, Marks," said Smithson sharply, "don't say that any more, please. See? It gets on my nerves. When a man has made an almighty fool of himself and is suffering for it in consequence, it doesn't improve his temper to have somebody keep on telling him that he might have foreseen what would happen. I'm going to give up thinking about it altogether. The spring's coming on now and gardeners will be wanted. I always had a little taste that way, luckily, and I may be able to find a job yet."

"Ah!" said Marks, "you are a younger man than I am. I don't know what's going to happen to me." Absent-mindedly he drew from his pocket his paper of

Brazilian diamonds and scattered them broadcast. A few sparrows fluttered down and went away disappointed. A stern park-keeper came up.

"Look here," he said sharply, "I can't have that mess made all over these gravel paths. I've a jolly good mind to make you pick 'em all up again. You'd better clear out, you two, and look slippy about it."

## X

### GOLD

THERE was once in the Dark Ages a boy of great ambition and solid worth. He did not play the fool and vex his teachers. He was kind to cats. He did not even annoy his papa and mamma. When other boys were playing at tournaments, damaging their clothes, and sometimes losing their tempers, he never joined them. He sat patiently at home studying the signs of the zodiac and the virtues of herbs and simples. He was devoted to study. His brain developed rapidly. At the age of twelve he had a forehead like the Albert Hall. This made other boys so jealous that they threw things at him, but he did not care because he knew he was doing right. He had great ideas. On the whitewashed wall of his little bedroom he wrote in large letters "CONCENTRASHUN." I may observe in passing that in the Dark Ages spelling was more a matter of individual taste than it is now. His father saw what his little son had done and took the necessary steps, but he could not help feeling he was spanking a boy with a future.

The father was but a poor armorer, and suffering severely from the competition of a big cut-price establishment that had just started in the same street. But he managed to scrape together enough money to apprentice his son to an astrologer and general alchemist.

The astrologer said frequently and emphatically that

he had never had a better or more studious apprentice. Time passed, and our young friend was no longer a boy. He was a youth, and, moreover, he was a youth whose roomy cranium and established character for steadiness attracted the attention of the maidens of the district. Girls then were very much as they are now. They would have nothing to say to youths with a certain amount of devil in them, however handsome or however wealthy they might be. What they liked was moral worth and plenty of forehead. So they threw shy glances at our young philosopher and they asked him to tea. Likewise, they suggested that he should take part in some amateur theatricals. Further, they said papa would be so glad if he would come over and smoke a pipe with him one night. But the young man would have none of it. Other apprentices suggested that he should take part in games where, although skill may have been present, chance largely preponderated. But he remained firm. He would not make love; he would not play cards; he would not come out and have a drink; he was wholly devoted to his work. He managed to scrape up enough money (scraping ran a good deal in the family) to take twelve lessons in the art of transmuting the baser metals into gold. It was true that the teacher had not yet discovered the secret himself, but there was always a possibility of some useful hints. Nowadays the guides to success in journalism, finance, and matrimony are almost invariably written by the people who have not attained it. The world has really changed very little.

It must not be supposed that the young man's devotion to the study of the great secret prevented him from close attention to his ordinary business. During the whole time of his apprenticeship he made only one

mistake. At the end of his apprenticeship his master offered him, and he accepted, the post of head of the horoscope department, and still every moment of leisure was given to study. He heard the music, he heard the dance go on, but for him there was to be no rest and no amusement until he had found the secret which would transmute the baser metals into gold. His brain development had now progressed to such an extent that his hats had to be specially built for him.

Years passed away and his master died. On his death-bed he called the studious head of the horoscope department to him and imparted the great secret. Our philosopher, now very middle-aged, went straight off to the kitchen to test it and found that it did not work. He countermanded the order for a wreath of everlastings with "Mizpah" on it and refused to attend the funeral.

After he had been middle-aged for a long period he became old. (Really in some respects the world has not changed one little bit.) He had never had any love; he had never had any fun; and he had not got the secret. It was very dull, but one must admire his strength of purpose. He went on.

The secret came at last when he was a toothless dodderer, and it came by accident. He sat before his furnace with a biscuit-tin which he had just converted into 22-carat gold. With great care he wrote out the long and elaborate formula.

Then he thought about it. If he had never discovered the secret it would always have been worth discovering. But now what could it do for him? Pleasure was a closed book and he had no wants that he had not ample means to satisfy. The discovery had merely stopped his work and spoilt his life. He

flung the formula into the furnace and his secret died with him.

If this simple story leads any reader to the conviction that the only things worth having are the things we have not got, it will not have been written in vain.



## XI

### THE PIG AND THE JACOBY

THE garden of the villa was tended by a man once a week and to some extent by the three daughters of the house. They were large, healthy girls who liked tennis, easy jokes, occasional tea-parties, and church on Sundays. None of them was plain, and the youngest was as near as nothing engaged to the curate. This tells you, or ought to tell you, exactly what kind of a garden it was.

You know, for instance, the bed cut out on the smaller lawn between the front of the house and the road. You are aware that by this time it is decently filled with the Jacoby geranium. You know that the bed is edged with blue lobelia or with pyrethrum, and that after all it does not much matter which. You can hear Agnes laughing in a strong voice of no musical quality at the back of the house because her sister Lilian, in running back for a ball on the smooth-shaven tennis lawn, has skidded and fallen humorously. You can hear Lilian's retort of "you *are* a beast"—words which she would not have used if the curate had been present. But you do not know what those patient geraniums in their deadly rows thought about it and other things. Therefore listen.

"As a matter of fact," said a plant which was rather taller than the rest, "we are quite beautiful."

"That's no use," said a miserable starveling.

The starveling was quite the smallest of the Jacoby geraniums. It never ought to have been sent out at all. The family had complained about it.

"And may I ask why?" said the tall Jacoby.

"Because we are so appallingly common," said the starveling. "It seems to me that it saddens the warm onset of summer to think how many Jacobies just like us are at this time being bedded out in gardens just like this."

"Undoubtedly," said the tall geranium, "we pay the price of our popularity. It would certainly be well if only the better-grown specimens were used."

"Thanks," sneered the starveling.

"I meant nothing personal. There are too many of us. I admit it. But surely our popularity is proof positive of our beauty. It is a comfort. It gives us confidence. It enables us to say that we are beautiful without either vanity or mock humility, without expressing our own opinion, but referring to the concentrated wisdom of generations of a higher race."

"The concentrated wisdom of seventy thousand suburban red-brick clerk boxes with a small strip of ground in front made to look like a jam tart and called a garden, and with a tennis-lawn for Agnes, Ethel, and Lilian. Another scream—I gather that that poor, long-legged child has gone over once more."

"I can understand why you personally should be embittered. For myself I can look at the exquisite color of my leaves and the sanguine glory of my——"

The telegraph boy who had called earlier in the morning had left the front gate open—an improper action, but common to all telegraph boys. A remarkably fat pig who had escaped from somewhere, with

no other motive than a vague desire to get somewhere else, strayed into the garden. It thrust what it confidently believed to be a loving smile, though it did not look it, into the middle of the geranium bed.

"Well, my little friends," said the pig, "and what were you talking about?"

"Put crudely," said the tall geranium, "it sounds a little vain. We were complaining of our excessive popularity, due, no doubt, to our remarkable beauty, but having a distinct tendency to lower us in the eyes of the fastidious and eclectic."

"What beautiful words you do use," said the pig, with a sigh that a superficial observer might have mistaken for a grunt. "Would that I had some of your despised popularity. Men give me nothing but foul food and grumble that I am a foul feeder. They keep me in the dirtiest places and complain that I am not nice in my habits. My very name is become a term of reproach and contempt. And yet I go on."

"And it all ends in dead leaves," said the starveling.

The pig shook his head. "It ends, I believe, in ham."

"We all have our cross to bear," said the tall Jacoby, who, like all vain people, had a streak of sentimentality in her disposition. "Here am I, a well-grown specimen of a beautiful plant. I know it, but I cannot be happy because I am conscious of commonness. Better the outcast that is rare than the cherished beauty that is common. Here I must sit and suffer through the long summer months until the frosts come."

"Must?" said the pig.

"Absolutely must," said the Jacoby.

"Not at all," said the pig.

A few moments passed. Lilian came round from

the back of the house in search of a lost tennis-ball. She saw the pig and screamed to Ethel. Ethel screamed to Agnes. Agnes screamed because it was her habit. Then, armed with rackets, they descended upon that pig. He went out of the garden in an awkward, untidy trot, complaining bitterly of injustice. They chevied him a little way down the road, met the curate, and were much ashamed. He walked back with them to the house.

“Dee-ah! dee-ah!” said the curate in his refined clerical voice, as he stood by the bed of Jacobies, “that pig has destroyed one of your best geraniums.”

## XII

### THE WRONG ELIXIR

IN the days when science was more poetical and less scientific than it is now there lived a certain alchemist. He was an old man. His feet shuffled and his knees doddered as he walked. He had the gray and hairy face of a sick monkey. His knowledge was so profound that he was generally respected, and his temper was so abominable that he was intensely unpopular. Therefore, when on a fine morning in May he came down to breakfast with an expression approaching complacency and entirely omitted to curse the cook (his universal procedure before taking food), his wife and family were surprised and a little nervous. It was so unlike him. His wife asked him if he were unwell. He not only answered the question, though on principle he never answered his wife's questions and usually affected not to have heard her speak, but he even added a "thank you" to his "no." She was the more distressed and he noticed it. He never thanked anybody. It portended something serious.

"The fact is," he said, "that the studies of a lifetime culminated last night in a discovery which I believe to be of importance. Hence my unusual hilarity."

Hilarity was perhaps a strong word for it. Yet even a great and tumultuous joy would have been comprehensible considering the nature of his discovery.

"Is it the philosopher's stone?" his wife asked.

But he was in no mood to overdo his vein of gracious light-heartedness. He stared at her stonily as if she were something in a bottle which he had already analyzed. Then he shuffled out towards his laboratory.

It was not the philosopher's stone. It was, if possible, an even greater discovery, for in the elixir which that very night he meant to taste he held the secret of eternal life. Eternal life was in these dark ages considered desirable by quite a number of people. He did not propose to communicate his secret to any of his fellows. It was to be for himself alone. They would go and he would remain, growing slowly into the wonder of the whole world. There were even indications in his researches that made it seem probable that with the unlimited years of his life there would be an accession of youth. His hair would grow again and he would get new teeth and perhaps learn once more the meaning of the word romance. Emperors would come from the East to look upon him—the one man in the world who held the secret.

In the meantime he was not disposed to be idle. His ordinary avocations called him. A gipsy-faced slut of a girl had come to him with gold pieces, got, the devil knows how. The alchemist did not inquire. He tested the gold and found it true. "And for this?" he asked.

"There is a man," she said in a tired, uninterested way, "who has got to die. I need a very swift poison and one that leaves no trace of poison in the body."

"Painless?" he inquired.

She shrugged her shoulders. "It is of no importance," she said. He begged her to come to him again in three days.

He was a man of vast experience and had no trouble

in satisfying the simple needs of the gipsy girl. He took one drug here and another there. He blended and cooked and strained. When he had finished he had a pale green liquor with neither taste nor smell. A drop of it would have killed an elephant, and a gallon of it would have defied the best of our modern chemists. It was of the same color as the elixir of life which he himself was to drink that evening.

And, of course, he made the usual mistake. Possibly he had primed himself with strong waters to give him courage for his experiment, and the courage had been bought at the expense of clear-headedness.

At any rate, he reached his hand to the wrong glass, and in a moment it was all over. He had drunk the poison that had been intended for the gipsy girl's faithless lover. He lay, an untidy lump of clay-colored wornout humanity, on the studio floor with a fixed grin on his face that would have frightened people. His wife found him there in the morning and wept bitterly, and was sincerely sorry that she would never hear him curse the cook again. There was a glass filled with a greenish fluid, and this she threw away, not knowing that she had lost here the discovery that had never been made till then and will never be made again. It seemed to her safer. The gipsy girl was annoyed, but said nothing. She had enough money left to buy herself a knife, and she got into serious trouble over it.

That he took the poison was undoubted. That he took the wrong elixir is a point on which I should like to have the dead man's opinion.

## XIII

### EVOLUTION

AN elderly ape perched himself comfortably high up on a tree of the forest. He was taking a rest cure, and he had a large bunch of bananas by his side for purposes of reference. When his twinkling eyes looked downwards into the heart of the forests it was as if he had looked into the night. Something moved in the darkness below him and tapped politely with a stone on the trunk of the tree.

"Are you at home, uncle?" called out a voice from below.

"You may come up," said the elderly ape, without enthusiasm. He groaned in spirit. This young nephew of his was a jabberer and a general nuisance, and had views. It was certain if he came up that he would talk. Talk to that elderly ape was nearly as bad as work. Perfect rest and bananas as near perfection as he could get them were the things that at his time of life he particularly desired.

"I thought I'd just look in as I was passing, uncle," said the younger ape. "I'm afraid I'm interrupting you at your luncheon?"

"You are interrupting me at my breakfast, which is a shade worse."

"Sorry. I see you've got plenty of first-rate bananas there."



"Then you see wrong," said the uncle. "They are second-rate. I've eaten six of them and I ought to know. And I have not got plenty. I have only got just enough for one."

"I didn't mean to suggest anything," said the young ape nervously.

"A nephew who suggests that he wants my bananas intentionally is impertinent but shows sense. A nephew who makes the same suggestion without intention is just as impertinent and is a blundering fool besides. Kindly peel that banana for me. I am tired this morning and not up to much work."

"With pleasure," said the nephew effusively. "I suppose you've heard of the great news in the scientific world?"

"What is it?" asked the uncle. "And be a little bit quicker with that banana. Laziness is the curse of all you young apes."

"The discovery is called evolution."

"Then I don't believe in it," said the uncle.

"But you don't know what it is."

"That," said the uncle majestically, "is immaterial. I disbelieve it just the same. I disbelieve it on the sound of it. How's your mother this morning?"

"Mamma is a little upset. One cocoanut too many last night, she seems to think. I do not profess to understand the arguments in favor of evolution myself. But the main conclusions, which I hear are generally accepted, are that the different forms of animal life sprang from one original form, some kind of a fish, I believe. We, of course, stand at the top of the scale, and we were evolved from man."

"Is this the kind of thing that your parents gave you a pious education for?" asked the uncle sternly.

"Well," said the young ape, "I always try to keep abreast of modern thought. When new facts spring up and they are proved you've got to believe in them."

"You may have," said his uncle contemptuously. "I, on the other hand, have not. I saw you only the other day with a chimpanzee of known bad character. I have no doubt that it is his influence which makes you talk in this ribald and blasphemous way."

"Not at all," said the nephew. "I had no wish to be ribald. What I say is that you must face facts. An ape has been discovered in some part of Europe wearing clothes like a man, using a knife and fork like a man, sleeping in a bed like a man."

"Then he should be sequestered," said the uncle. "If not worse," he added thoughtfully.

"Then, again," the nephew urged, "there is the anatomical argument. The shape of the skull of a man is different from that of an ape. It is not so highly developed. Now the shape of my skull——"

"The shape of your skull," said the elderly uncle, "will undergo some material alteration in a minute if you insist on talking this nonsense. I tell you that man could never, under the most favorable conditions, develop into an ape. We are as far above him as the stars above the trees. Do you mean to tell me that this tree could evolve into a fixed planet?"

"Of course not," said the nephew nervously. "My argument is——"

"Peel me another banana," said the uncle, "and don't argue. You never hear me argue. I tell people things. I say that they are so. That is enough. There is no necessity to go beyond that. Now go home and try to live a better and cleaner life in future, and if I ever

hear that word evolution from you again I will knock a considerable hole in your face.”

“All I wanted to urge——”

“Get down the tree,” roared the uncle.

And the nephew obeyed promptly.

As he slithered and scrambled down his uncle threw banana-skins at him and hit him every time. After that he gave a sigh of content and resumed the rest cure.

## XIV

### BLUE ROSES

THERE were once blue roses.

It was long and long ago, and even then the blue roses were very scarce. There was but one bush growing in a wood near to a royal palace, and until the flowers were in bloom it looked exactly like an ordinary wild rose. But children playing in the wood in June had come upon it and spread the story, so that many went out to see the blue roses, and strange stories were told of the power that they had.

In the royal palace there lived a princess who distinguished herself from the princesses of romance by not being at all beautiful. This was the harder upon her because she was a woman who herself worshipped beauty wherever she saw it and of whatever kind it might be. When she was told that a marriage had been arranged and would shortly take place between herself and a prince from a neighboring country whom she had never seen she shrugged her shoulders and acquiesced. These things were a matter of state. She would never love the prince, and her mirror told her that he would never love her, but the succession would be secured.

Now, as it chanced, this prince, though not otherwise notable, was an extremely beautiful young man and fully conscious of it. He spent much time and

trouble on his dress and his adornment. He looked like the very picture of a prince always. He also had recognized that the marriage was one of interest and expediency, and when he saw the little plain woman who was to be his wife he was quite polite and fascinating in his manners. He did not grumble. He was not recalcitrant. At the same time he was not in the least in love with her. This was entirely as she had expected. The really serious trouble was that she fell very much in love with him. So much so that she annoyed the king, her father, and the ministers on whose counsel he relied by saying that, come what might, even if she never married at all, she should not marry this prince.

“What have you against him?” the king asked.

The princess laughed. Pressed further, she would only repeat with obstinacy that she would not marry him.

The natural effect of this was to make everybody extremely disagreeable to her. All who had the right, and some who had not, spoke at large on the subject of duty. So the princess kept out of the way, in her own apartments or wandering in the wood by the palace. And sometimes she wept. And sometimes she painted from memory a portrait of the prince who loved her not. For a princess she painted rather well.

One day, as she sat in her apartments, she heard a young page beneath the window speaking to his fellows and saying that as he passed through the wood he had seen the blue roses. Then the stories that she had heard of them came back to her mind, and all unattended she went out into the wood. Long was her search, but it was rewarded in the end. Deep in a shadowed place far from the track she saw the intense

blue of the strange roses, and at the foot of the bush she sat and rested and thought for a while.

Then timorously she plucked the petals from one of the roses and ate them, and their taste seemed to be at first sweet and afterwards very bitter. Having done this she lay down at full length waiting to see whether the strange story of the blue roses was true, or whether perhaps the petals might be poisonous, or whether they might have no power at all over her. And very soon she slept.

In her sleep she was still herself, but she had become very beautiful, so that it was a delight to her to see her own face in a mirror or in a clear stream. And she knew that on the morrow she was to wed the prince. And he came to her with love in his eyes, love in his words, so that for the first time she knew what it was to be ignorant whether to yield or to resist. As he kissed her she awoke again.

Now the sunlight had found out the corner where she lay and shone hot upon her. The blue roses had done their work and she had known love. Then she thought to herself of the bitterness of going on for the rest of her life without it, and she took out her dagger and cut down that rose bush and tore out the roots of it, that no one else might suffer as she suffered.

After that she lived for quite a long time, rather bad-tempered and slightly addicted to good works, but the blue roses are happily lost to us.

## XV

### THE STREET OF PERIL

#### I

THERE was in the old days a king who had a very beautiful daughter. It is to be remarked that in the old days all the kings had very beautiful daughters. This should form the subject of a Royal Commission.

As I was just going to say, when I started to think about something else, the name of the very beautiful daughter of this king was the Princess Caramel.

Her father adored her, and had the highest possible opinion of her. It is quite possible to adore people without having any opinion of them at all. But the king did not do this. He considered the Princess Caramel to be the perfect woman. He wondered how he was to find any man who would be half good enough to marry her. The thought of this used to keep him awake at night. He would say to his courtiers: "The Princess Caramel has the most superb beauty, but she also has the highest ability and the finest character."

And then the courtiers would yawn and say they had noticed it themselves.

#### II

The trouble that the kings of fable had in selecting husbands for their very beautiful daughters should

engage the attention of the Psychical Research Society.

One day the king entered the apartments of the Princess Caramel, and spake as follows:

“My dearest child, lying awake upon my bed, I devised a test by which I might tell if any man were fit to have the high honor of being your husband. I have now under process of construction a street which shall be called the Street of Peril. It will be one mile in length, and it will contain all the temptations of which the professors of iniquity can bethink themselves. The man who can make the passage of that street in anything under twenty minutes will be as gold that has been tried in the furnace. He shall be your husband.”

“Thanks so much, papa,” said the princess. But, privily, she took her own dispositions.

So the street was built and furnished. It was full of allurement and perfume. Delirious and gambling games went on there, and the aspirant had to pass the tables of pochre and orchshun and znooka. There were also musicians with pipe and tabor. (The difference between a tabor and a tambourine is not worth mentioning.) There were dancing girls of surpassing beauty and excessive amiability. There were tables spread with the richest and most enticing banquets, and, be it noted, the young aspirant had to enter the street fasting.

### III

Precisely at eight o'clock in the evening the aspirant entered the Street of Peril. At the other end of the



street waited the king with his stop-watch in his hand, and the band of the Striped Hungarians.

When, as always happened, at the end of twenty minutes the aspirant had not appeared, and telephoned that he was detained by a fog in the City, the band of the Striped Hungarians would play the melody of a song which was to the effect that there was another good man who had gone wrong.

The Street of Peril became popular. "To show oneself worthy of the Princess Caramel" became a synonym for moral degradation, just as "I apply for the Chiltern Hundreds" means "Can I have a peerage, please?"

At the end of ten years no one had succeeded in making the passage of the Street of Peril in the prescribed time. And the king, who was not so young as he had formerly been, fell very sick.

## IV

As he lay a-dying he called his daughter to him.

"Caramel, I have done you a great and grievous wrong. I have required perfection for you, and there is no perfection in this world. Therefore my shy wild-rose has been left to fade upon her stem, so to speak."

"I look all right by artificial light," said the princess modestly.

"While I searched in vain for perfection, your life was left without joy or savor, ascetic, and cloistral."

"Not entirely, dear papa."

"How mean you?"

"Well, when you told me that you had devised this

Street of Peril, by bribery and corruption I arranged certain matters with the professors of iniquity. And, not to put too fine a point upon it, for the last ten years I have been one of the temptations.”

The king died immediately.

## XVI

### THE CURATE, THE BOY, AND THE BEE

THE bee lay dead on the gravel path just outside the patent hive. The curate, who never missed the chance of an object lesson, called attention to it.

"See," he said to the boy whom it was his pleasure and duty to instruct, "here lies this poor little insect, its life-work done, its task accomplished."

The boy looked at it stolidly. He was a bullet-headed boy, with spectacles, and a nasty German habit of taking nothing for granted.

"Yes," said the boy, "in a garden there's a lot of that kind of thing about. A bit further up the path there is a black slug. I pulped his head with my heel as we passed. So his life's work's done and his task accomplished. There's a dead chrysanthemum. More life-work and task as per schedule."

"Gently, George," said the curate, "gently. You are going on too fast. Your analogies are incorrect. The slug does harm; the bee does good. The chrysanthemum has never worked; the bee is always busy. You may remember how this fact impressed the great Watts. He noticed how the little busy bee improved each shining hour, and gathered honey all the day from every——"

"Half-speed astern," said the boy. "Steady your horses. Put in the reverse. That somewhat spavined argument ought not to be worked any longer. All the

slug cares for is to get something to eat, and that is all the bee cares for. The fact that, unless some thoughtful boy happens to pulp their heads, slugs feed on strawberries and lettuces, does not affect the argument. Bees would feed on strawberries and lettuces if they did not prefer honey."

"One moment," said the curate, triumphant. "Answer me this question. Does the slug exercise foresight, does the slug lay up a store of honey for itself?"

"No," said the boy. "The slug does not lay up a store of honey. Neither does it lay up a store of dog biscuits. Neither does it lay up a store of anything else. The reason is simple. There is always food for it. If it went into the warehouse business like the bee, it would show not foresight, but extreme folly."

"You must admit, at any rate, that the bee shows extreme wisdom. Could you build one of those waxen cells?"

"I hate cells, anyhow," said the boy. "That is why I cannot consent to have the wisdom of the bee played upon me. It's fool enough to go into a patent hive, and sweat its life out at filling up sections with honey, which sections it will never keep, since they will be taken out of the hive and sold for a shilling apiece, or more if you have luck. The bee has no wish to benefit humanity at all. When humanity sneaks the honey it has to wear a veil and thick gloves. The bee merely benefits humanity by being a stupendous idiot."

"Hush," said the curate. "Men far better and wiser than you are, or perhaps ever will be, have admired the wisdom and industry of the bee." He picked up the dead insect and laid it on the palm of his fat hand. "I am humble enough to say that I wish that I myself were more like this little insect."

"But you are," said the boy. "Exactly like it."

"I fear not," said the curate, with a gratified smile. "I try to do my work, but every now and then there are hours of laziness which——"

"I don't mean that at all," said the boy. "What you haven't noticed is that this particular bee happens to be a drone. Now let's go and play tennis."

## XVII

### GEORGE

"HE is a remarkably plain young man," she wrote in her diary the first day she met him. "He has rather an interesting face," she said to her mamma a month later, as she decked her apricot-colored tea-gown with the William-Allen-Richardsons that he had just sent her.

When she wrote to her best friend to give the news of her engagement she expressed herself thus: "He has not the regular-featured dollish good looks which I have always hated in men. He has a strong, characterful face and magnificent eyes."

"You loveliest one!" she sighed, as she poured out his tea at the third breakfast of the honeymoon. "I could sit and look at you for ever."

Six months later, when the other man had come along, she observed to her husband: "I don't know whether you're aware of it, George, but your hair's getting most frightfully thin on the top, and you're just about the last man in the universe that can afford to go bald."

A man's looks must not be judged by appearances.

## XVIII

### PULL THE RIGHT STRING

THE great man had a well-salaried berth at his disposal. It was a comfortable berth. The man who got it was likely to go short of nothing except work.

Jones had really deserved it. The great man, in considering Jones's application, admitted to himself that the claim was well founded.

Brown's testimonials were magnificent, and he sent them in. The great man said that he had never seen better testimonials.

Smith had no testimonials, had deserved nothing, and was otherwise unsuitable. But Smith had a little talk with the great man's wife.

Smith got that berth.

My poor friends, it is not politeness to the paying cashier which will arrange the overdraft.

Go straight for the inner office.

## XIX

### TOO MUCH SELF-HELP

THE Editor, having come to the conclusion that his paper needed to be livened up, put on his hat and went round to the Employment Agency.

“Good morning, Mr. Agency,” he said. “I want you to find me a young man who can write really smart paragraphs.”

“Thank you,” said Mr. Agency as he booked the order. “We’ve got four hundred and eighty of them on our books. I’ll send a few dozen of the best round to your office this afternoon and you can pick one. That do?”

“Nicely,” said the Editor, and rose to go, when he remembered something. “By the way,” he said, “I also want a boy who can be trusted to take charge of the stamps and petty cash.”

Then Mr. Agency threw down his pen. He did not book that order. He gave a sigh like a high-power suction-pump. “Do you?” he said in a melancholy voice. “Well, if you find two, save one for me. I want one myself.”

Oh, my poor friends who are trying to be cleverer than you are, remember that the world also wants honest men.

And, as things stand at present, Patent Tills with the Unmonkeyable Lock are a better market than Brain Fertilizers containing Free Phosphorus.



## XX

### NOT IMPERVIOUS TO DAMP

THE pretty suffragette made a long, convincing speech, filled with historical allusions, a quart of best mixed statistics, and a nice peroration, all made to wind up. A report of that speech appeared in a daily paper which had been disappointed of a company prospectus, and consequently had space to fill.

Mr. Average came home from the City, read that daily paper till he came to the report of that speech, and nearly went past Surbiton, which is where he lives.

A few days later the pretty suffragette accompanied by friends went out to make trouble. They made it. The pretty suffragette managed to create a riot, and slapped a good-tempered, mutton-fed policeman on the nose.

“And she’d jolly well get six months hard for that if I were the magistrate,” growled Mr. Average.

And then the pretty suffragette, pleading in court in her defense, broke down and wept bitterly. As a matter of fact, she was a woman.

Mr. Average read all about it and was conscious of a sense of discomfort. “Oh, take and give her the silly old vote if she wants it,” he said, feeling vaguely ashamed.

Pause before you smile at Mr. Average.

The strictly logical mind is one of the few things in this world that cannot be produced by Chemistry out of Coal-tar.

Inconsistency does not necessarily hurt. The British Constitution is founded on it.









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